



County Corner

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Public Health - Making a difference every day

It is interesting to me that when you ask people about public health, many respond that they don't utilize the services of the health department. Oh really? You don't have to come to our building at 1035 First Avenue West to utilize the services the Health Department provides. In fact, as will be explained later, the services your neighbor receives in the building may have a positive benefit on your health.

Did you know the environmental health staff of the Department inspects restaurants and other food purveyors such as grocery stores at least once per year, many more times if the risk of contracting a food-borne illness is high? We also inspect motels and other public accommodations, mobile home and



Flathead County Health Officer JOE RUSSELL

By statutory title, I am the Flathead County Health Officer and by function, the director of the Flathead City-County Health Department. My background is in environmental health but I enjoy every aspect of the provision of public health services to the community. Every day is different and that keeps me coming back. I have a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Washington in Seattle. I am married to Renee, a wonderful lady who has put up with me for almost 22 years. We have three children; Jason who is a freshman at Montana Tech, Tyler who is a sophomore at Flathead High School and soon to be part of the first graduating class of Glacier High School, and Kayla who is a fourth grader at Edgerton Elementary School. Our family is very active and enjoys living in the Flathead.

RV parks, swimming pools and spas, and schools and daycare facilities to minimize the risk of contracting disease or to assure the safety of that specific environment. We operate a local air pollution control program, conducting administrative duties (including enforcement activities) to minimize poor health outcomes as a result of breathing polluted air. We inspect public water supplies to ensure the water you drink is safe and conduct administrative activities associated with proper treatment and disposal of sewage when your home is not connected to a municipal sewage treatment system such as those found in the cities of Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls.

Our community health nursing staff conducts ongoing surveillance of communicable as well as foodborne and waterborne disease in our community, contacting those who are ill and those that come in contact with ill people. We provide vaccinations to immunize the members of the community against many communicable diseases such as influenza and measles. Remember the concept that the services your neighbor receives possibly having a positive health benefit to you? Did you know that infants under the age of six months may not receive an influenza

vaccination? What do you think is the best way of protecting the infant from contracting the flu? It is to immunize everyone who may come in contact with the infant. You won't get the flu if you don't come in contact with anyone who is ill with the flu, either directly or indirectly. Do yourself, your family members, your neighbors and the rest of the community a favor - get immunized!

If you do come to our building you will see many other programs that we operate for the benefit of the community. Our nurses provide many other services not mentioned above such as a visiting nurse program to assist at-risk mothers and infants in positive pregnancy and childhood outcomes. Our WIC nutritional program provides educational and administrative assistance to mothers, infants and children who without these services would not receive proper nutrition at the most critical times in their lives. Our reproductive health services staff provides several clinical services as well as a breast and cervical cancer screening program and HIV-AIDS counseling and testing. Our health promotion staff works in the community to promote healthy lifestyle choices such as issues around tobacco use, obesity and worksite wellness.

"The needs of the future take precedence over the demands of the present."

— County Commissioners: Joe Brenneman, Gary Hall & Dale Lauman