

Written work examples



DPH Employee Honored by City of Chesterfield

St. Louis County Department of Public Health Environmental Representative Kim Williams was recently honored by the city of Chesterfield. Williams was awarded the Green Team Award and was made a member of Chesterfield's Citizens Environmental Advisory Committee's Green Team. She was thanked for her participation in various City of Chesterfield events and for her outstanding and innovative education efforts to reduce the use of plastics and encourage recycling.

"I am honored to get this award," Williams said. "I love working with residents and my amazing team."

Williams has been working for DPH for three years. She said she enjoys engaging with residents and employees on a daily basis. Williams said some of her favorite things she does in her position include social media engagement, speaking with new employees about the waste program and building relationships with our new community partners.

Williams has worked hard to spread the word about the Environmental Services' Recycle Wizard to residents of all ages. The [Recycle Wizard](#) is an online tool that shows users the proper way to dispose of or recycle waste items. [Information on our Environmental Services Division.](#)

Thank you, Kim, for your services and dedication to our community. To see more of Kim's awesome environmental work visit the Recycle St. Louis County [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.



Dr. Kanika Cunningham Steps Up as Public Health Director

The Saint Louis County Department of Public Health welcomes its new director, Dr. Kanika Cunningham. Cunningham was appointed by County Executive Dr. Sam Page effective January 2, 2022. She had previously served as a public health officer with DPH.

A St. Louis native, Dr. Cunningham graduated from Saint Louis University School of Medicine. Prior to joining DPH, she was the associate medical director at Family Care Health Centers in Carondelet.

Dr. Cunningham is passionate about bringing health services to under-resourced neighborhoods and communities of color. In her role at Family Care Health Centers, she prioritized addiction treatment, an issue that she plans to keep on the front burner at DPH. St. Louis County faces an ongoing opioid epidemic, one which increasingly affects Black residents.

As a family medicine provider, Dr. Cunningham looks forward to bringing a patient-centered, holistic perspective to the only health department in Missouri that offers clinical services.

“I love to practice medicine, but I have to also take a step beyond and look at the other things that can affect someone's health and their mental health as well,” she told St. Louis Public Radio. “As a primary care doctor, I care about the entire individual, the whole person.”

2023 Healthy Living Calendar Contest Winners Announced

The St. Louis County Department of Public Health has released the 2023 Healthy Living Calendar. Congratulations to each of this year's calendar design winners! DPH received 254 creative poster submissions.

Annually for more than 20 years, DPH invites all K-12 students in St. Louis County to create and submit their artwork that encourages a healthy habit. This year students were asked to pick from six healthy habits and make a colorful, creative poster. The healthy habits are:

- Healthy eating
- Healthy friendships
- Healthy hygiene
- Reducing and preventing stress (positive ways)
- Staying physically active
- Saying no to drugs and alcohol



The Healthy Living Calendar serves as a great reminder for students and adults to develop and continue healthy habits in their lives. DPH staff members voted on the submitted artwork and selected 13 winners:

- **Cover:** Maryellen K. - Kellison Elementary
- **January:** Olive R. - Carman Trails Elementary
- **February:** Madeline A. - Kellison Elementary
- **March:** Sydney B. - Marquette High School
- **April:** Lluvia M. - Nipher Middle School
- **May:** Willow W. - All Saints Academy - St. Ferdinand
- **June:** Kavya C. - Meramec Elementary
- **July:** Kaliyah H. - Bayless High School
- **August:** Caroline G. - Our Lady of Lourdes
- **September:** Emma H. - Kellison Elementary
- **October:** Isabella D. - Holy Cross Academy
- **November:** Alina Q. - Bayless High School
- **December:** Leyla B. - Bayless High School

“The contest allows DPH an opportunity to work together to educate youth about promoting healthy behaviors,” said Dana Giboney-Wallace, DPH health education coordinator. “The purpose of the contest was to initiate discussions and encourage students to spread healthy messages to their peers and community focusing on one of the themes.”

Recently, DPH Director Dr. Kanika Cunningham and health education coordinators visited Our Lady of Lourdes' school assembly to present Caroline G. with her winning artwork and fabulous prizes. DPH looks forward to continuing this contest and are hoping you will consider participating in next year's 2024 Health Living Calendar Contest. DPH expresses gratitude for all

the students who participated in the contest and for the teachers and parents who assisted their students. Details regarding the 2024 Healthy Living Calendar Contest will be released in August. [View the full calendar of artwork.](#)



Five Tips for Keeping Kids' Teeth Healthy

Brush, floss, smile! February is National Children’s Dental Health Month. The St. Louis County Department of Public Health celebrates this month-long national health observance to promote the benefits of good oral hygiene.

DPH Chief Dentist Dr. Duane Dilworth said parents sometimes think that baby teeth are going to fall out anyway; therefore, parents don’t seek dental care for their children’s teeth. Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps kids to get a good start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

“Preventive care, like cleanings, is the key to good dental health,” Dr. Dilworth said.

Tooth decay, also known as cavities, is the [most common chronic disease](#) among children in the United States. The good news is that cavities are preventable. Dr. Dilworth shared five tips that parents should follow to help keep their kid’s teeth healthy:

1. Dental care should begin when the first teeth erupt.
2. Don’t let children sleep with a bottle in their mouth; this can lead to decay of the upper anterior teeth.
3. Brush at least twice a day. The bacteria that cause cavities multiply at night. The most important time to brush your teeth is before you go to bed to clean out the old bacteria before they multiply and then brush in the morning to clean out the new bacteria that multiplied overnight.
4. Brush after you eat because the bacteria break down the food to acid within twenty minutes. The acid that is produced causes cavities.
5. Children’s teeth have the same problems as adult teeth. This means they need the same treatment as adult teeth.

DPH offers dental services for children and adults at John C. Murphy Health Center in Berkeley. To make an appointment, or for more information about what is needed to receive services, please call [314-615-0500](tel:314-615-0500).



Free Narcan Available Through DPH

Anyone can be supportive of a friend or loved one who is experiencing substance use disorder. The cycles of change and the journey to sobriety look different for each person. Naloxone (Narcan) is a way to save the life of someone aiming towards recovery.

Anyone can save a life with naloxone. Naloxone is a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. An opioid overdose can occur when taking too many opioids or taking opioids with other drugs. An overdose can cause a person to stop breathing or breathe so slowly that their body does not get enough oxygen. Anyone at risk of having or seeing an opioid overdose, or anyone who spends time with people who use opioids, should consider carrying naloxone.

Substance use continues to be a major public health crisis in St. Louis County. In 2021, St. Louis County lost 490 community members due to substance use. There has been a rise in fentanyl contamination in drug supply within our region. In 2021, fentanyl was present in 94.5% of opioid-related deaths.

Narcan is safe and easy to use. It is available to anyone who requests it while supplies last at our three DPH health centers, Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. No appointment is necessary and no ID required. Just ask the lobby staff for naloxone or Narcan. St. Louis County residents can also request to receive a free Narcan rescue kit by visiting: <https://bit.ly/3oMs0Hp>. For more information on overdose resources please visit our [substance use website](#).

Narcan saves lives. Get yours free!



Healthy Habits to Fuel Your Future

Nutrition has an impact on our future as well as our present. “Fuel for the Future” is the 2023 theme for National Nutrition Month. During the month of March, everyone is invited to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthy eating and physical activity habits that can make a difference that lasts far beyond the end of the month.

Eating with sustainability in mind is a tasty way to nourish ourselves during every phase of life while protecting the environment. A dietitian can help you create healthy habits that are sustainable and celebrate your unique needs.

St. Louis County Department of Public Health WIC Nutrition Coordinator Christine Stellner, a registered dietitian, said spring is a great time to begin new healthy eating habits. Stellner shared seven tips for new habits:

- Follow [MyPlate guidelines](#) where you will find detailed information on each of the five food groups, including types of foods, amounts needed for each age group, and health benefits of each.
- Families can use MyPlate as a guide to find a recipe, plan a menu, make a grocery list, and shop from the list. Make sure to take advantage of store specials including seasonal vegetables and fruits. Decrease or avoid bringing home extra foods that are mainly salty or sweet.
- A trip to the local farmers market is a fun way to get the freshest produce and learn more about where the foods we eat come from. Better yet, plant a garden yourself!
- Replace high-sugar drinks and alcohol with water.
- Eat together as a family. Set regular meal and snack times. Turn off TVs and other screens.
- As an adult, model healthy eating habits and your child will do the same.
- Healthy eating habits and physical activity go hand in hand. Take advantage of warmer weather to get outside and walk or play.

Access to nutritional food can be challenging for many families. St. Louis County Department of Public Health’s WIC program provides free nutritious supplemental foods, nutrition tips for stretching your food dollar, individualized nutrition education and counseling for at-risk pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children up to 5 years of age.

“Based on the outcome of counseling, WIC nutritionists provide written and verbal nutrition information and help guide clients to set specific, measurable and achievable goals,” Stellner said. “Goal setting of this type improves our client’s success and confidence in themselves and their abilities to provide for their families.”

St. Louis County Department of Public Health operates four WIC sites at the following locations:

- North Central Community Health Center at 4000 Jennings Station Road
- John C. Murphy Health Center at 6121 North Hanley Road, Berkeley
- South County Health Center at 4580 South Lindbergh Blvd., Sunset Hills
- Koch Park WIC office at 2137 Charbonier, Florissant

For additional information about the WIC program, please call the Saint Louis County Department of Public Health at [**\(314\) 615-7900**](tel:3146157900). Office hours are Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.



Appreciation for Animal Control Officers

Whether it's enforcing animal control laws, reuniting a furry friend with its owner, or educating our community on animal welfare and proper care of pets, our St. Louis County Animal Care and Control Officers dedicate each day to help every animal they can in St. Louis County. As a small token of our appreciation for all the ACOs who serve St. Louis County, DPH would like to recognize not only the outstanding efforts and commitment that are made on a daily basis, but also those who leave lasting positive impressions in our community.

One such incident occurred recently when ACO Anita was faced with a very difficult situation. A resident's large family dog was in bad shape and needed assistance, and the resident was understandably upset. In the midst of a very difficult situation, ACO Anita was "kind and helpful," the resident tells us, observing that the officer made "a bad situation a lot better." The family continued to recognize and give thanks for the genuine sincerity and reiterated that when they are ready, they intend to adopt from APA Olivette. As an act of paying it forward, the family also donated blankets to pets currently being cared for in the shelter. ACO Anita left a lasting impression on this family.

[APA](#) Chief Executive Officer Sarah Javier, who leads the non-profit the county has hired to manage the APA Olivette animal shelter, pointed out another situation in which county ACOs excelled at their work. "I had the opportunity to interact with Anita and Lauryn, a person she was training. I was so impressed. She and Lauryn were assisting with a situation involving wildlife, and the compassion and care they extended to the animal were so genuine and heartfelt. It was apparent that they both cared deeply about helping animals, and I was grateful for the way they engaged with members of our team in a collaborative way, with a shared focus on the best outcome for the animal. This is what partnership is all about."

Thank you to ACO Anita, Lauryn and all those who dedicate so much to helping protect the health and welfare of people and animals in St. Louis County.



DPH Celebrates Long-Time Employee's Retirement

The St. Louis County Department of Public Health recently celebrated the retirement of Jenelle Leighton, DPH Clinical Quality Administrator. Leighton started at DPH as a nurse more than 25 years ago. She then worked in various roles at DPH including sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis care before becoming the resident subject matter expert for all things communicable disease. Leighton made a remarkable impact during her time at DPH.

Leighton played a key role in St. Louis County's COVID-19 response by setting up testing and case investigation protocols. She also played a major role in the COVID mass vaccination clinics and ensured clinical quality and equity. DPH's response to every major communicable disease threat in at least the last decade, including the H1N1 response, the Ebola response, and the Mpox response, was led by Leighton. Her leadership has shaped the DPH hepatitis program and the DPH tuberculosis program into one of the best in Missouri. She's recognized as a regional expert by doctors and public health professionals alike.

In 2021, Leighton was recognized by the Missouri Council for Public Health Nursing with the Missouri Public Health Nursing Leadership Award to recognize her excellence in public health nursing practice. She also received a proclamation from St. Louis County Executive Sam Page stating that May 19, 2023, was known as Jenelle Leighton Day. Her expertise, patience, and kindness serve as a model for public service and customer-focused care. Leighton's legacy will continue through the generations of staff that she has mentored at DPH and the countless lives that her public health practice has touched. She will be greatly missed and we wish her all the best in her retirement.



National Nurses Month

The impact nurses make on health care is unparalleled. The St. Louis County Department of Public Health is observing National Nurses Month as it provides an opportunity to promote understanding and appreciation of the invaluable contributions of our nurses. This year's theme is "You Make a Difference," which honors the positive impact nurses have on everyone's lives.

DPH nurses make a huge difference in the quality of patient care across our three health centers. Quality patient care has a direct positive impact on the lives of many members of our community daily.

"By educating our patients, advocating for our patients, offering emotional support in the most troubling of times, nurses don't just help improve patient outcomes, they can literally help change lives -- and this happens daily," said Jody Wilkins, DPH health centers administrator and registered nurse. "There is a level of trust between the patient, provider, medical assistants, and nurses."

Our nurses lend a compassionate ear to our patients, helping to arrange transportation, scheduling procedures, calling pharmacies to troubleshoot medication pickups, holding patients' hands during procedures and blood draws, and so much more.

"Making a difference in someone's life gives you a sense of purpose and being part of the safety net is the most important thing to me," said Wilkins. "Serving our patients which includes the vulnerable and underserved population and providing the best care possible means the world to me."

Like many other healthcare centers, navigating through a pandemic was hard work, but our nurses showed dedication by providing quality healthcare services. Our success has only been possible because of our employee's commitment to our mission, the patients, and the community, as well as amazing teamwork and supportive leadership, said Wilkins.

DPH has approximately 20 nurses working in the three health centers, including health center managers who are registered nurses and work side by side with their teams. Our nurses work in family practice, pediatrics, OB-GYN, psychiatry, nurse care management, walk-in vaccine clinic and triage. DPH is currently hiring dedicated, mission-driven nurses to join our team. For more information and to apply, visit our [website](#).

Thank you to our DPH nursing staff for working to make St. Louis County a healthy community. You are appreciated!



Mosquito Spring Safety

Spring is here! As we look forward to the beauty of spring showers bringing May flowers, remember that with spring showers also come mosquitoes! These nuisance pests can ruin a perfect morning dog walk or even an early evening barbeque dinner outdoors. Water is essential to mosquito breeding. One inch of water can harbor up to 200 mosquito larvae.

If you are experiencing an increase in mosquito activity where you live, there are two main ways to protect yourself and others from mosquitos — reduce mosquito breeding sites around your home and follow safety measures.

To reduce mosquito breeding sites around your home, perform a breeding site inspection and dump, cover or fill in areas where you see standing water. DPH Vector-borne Disease Prevention Specialist Brooke Dedrick said common areas in which you may find mosquitoes breeding include clogged gutters, old tires, wheelbarrows, buckets, unmaintained pools, drains etc., that are not properly flowing. Anywhere water can collect can be a potential breeding site.

For personal protection against mosquitoes, Dedrick recommends the use of an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellent with one of the active ingredients: DEET, Picaridin, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE). When used as directed, these repellents are proven safe and effective. It is important to read the product label for instructions before using EPA-registered repellents. For additional information on using insect repellent safely and effectively, visit the [EPA's website](#).

“Should you have any questions or need assistance in accessing your property, please contact the [vector-borne disease prevention program](#) for an inspection,” Dedrick said. “We are happy to help. The issue may not be your property but a neighboring property, as some nuisance mosquitoes have been found to have flight ranges up to a few hundred feet.”



Summer Health Safety Tips

It is officially summer, and with that comes more time outdoors. Whether you're playing sports, attending a social gathering or simply enjoying nature, the St. Louis County Department of Public Health wants to make sure you do so safely.

Stay cool in the summer heat

One of the most important things to do in hot weather is to stay hydrated. Make sure to drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you don't feel thirsty. It's also a good idea to avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol, as they can dehydrate you. If you are a pet owner, make sure to provide your pet with plenty of cool water.

Swimming is a great way to stay cool in the summer heat, but keep water safety at the top of your mind. Never leave children unattended near water, even for a moment. Additionally, make sure to wear a life jacket when boating or participating in water sports. It's also a good idea to know your swimming abilities and stick to designated swimming areas.

If you're planning to be outside for an extended period of time, try to stay in shaded areas as much as possible. You can also use a fan or misting system to help keep cool. It's important to take breaks and rest in a cool place if you start to feel dizzy or lightheaded. It is recommended to limit time spent outdoors if possible on extremely hot days. Stay in an air-conditioned place as much as possible. If your home does not have air conditioning, you should go to a [St. Louis County cooling shelter](#).

Cars can quickly heat up to dangerous temperatures, even with a window cracked open. Never leave children or pets in the car. While anyone left in a parked car is at risk, children are especially vulnerable.

Another important step to take is to protect your skin from the sun's harmful rays. Always wear sunscreen with at least SPF 30 and reapply it every two hours, or more often if you're swimming or sweating. Wearing a hat and sunglasses can also help to protect your face and eyes.

Finally, be sure to check on elderly family members or neighbors who may be more susceptible to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Keep an eye out for signs of heat exhaustion, such as heavy sweating, fatigue, and muscle cramps, and seek medical attention immediately if you or someone else experiences these symptoms.

Prevent foodborne illness at picnics and barbecues

Summer is a popular time for picnics and barbecues. Remember the 4 steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook and chill. Be sure to keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot, using ice packs or coolers to maintain safe temperatures. Don't leave food out in the sun for too long, and always wash your hands before handling food. Make sure your meats reach an internal temperature high enough to kill germs, and refrigerate all food within 2 hours of cooking (1 hour if it's 90°F or warmer outside). Get more grilling tips on the [CDC's how to grill safely page](#).

Fight the bite

Prevent mosquito bites by using an EPA-registered insect repellent, avoiding areas with standing water and wearing lightweight long-sleeved shirts and pants when possible outside. Additionally, it's a good idea to check for ticks and remove them promptly if found. By taking these precautions, you can enjoy the great outdoors without the annoyance of bug bites. More insect safety information can be found in our [mosquito safety story](#).

Birth Joy & Birth Equity

Diversity in healthcare leadership is crucial, and representation in healthcare leadership is even more critical. Black nursing and physician leaders are vital players. DPH Director Dr. Kanika Cunningham participated as a panelist in the 10th Annual Health Disparities Symposium hosted by the [National Association of Health Services Executives- \(NAHSE\) St. Louis Chapter](#), [SSM](#) and [Mominibus](#). The topic for this year's event theme was "Birth Joy & Birth Equity," and hospital leaders, nontraditional providers and mothers spoke about their journeys and challenges as clinicians and patients regarding birth equity.

[Birth equity](#) is defined as the assurance of the conditions of optimal births for all people with a willingness to address racial and social inequalities in a sustained effort. Pregnancy and childbirth are very special and powerful experiences for women. Unfortunately, persistent systemic racism within the U.S. health care and social systems has led to inadequate prenatal and postnatal support, contributing to increased mortality rates and pregnancy-related health challenges for Black women.

[In Missouri](#), Black women are three times more likely to die within one year of pregnancy than white women. [In St. Louis County](#), Black women had a higher rate of pregnancy-related deaths than white women. From 2014 to 2018, there were 27.8 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in St. Louis County.

During the panel discussion, Dr. Cunningham and DPH Community Health Worker-Educator Jasmine Williams discussed birthing, Black joy and barriers that are faced in achieving equity for birthing women. Dr. Cunningham specifically emphasized Black joy when practicing as a physician by building patient relationships as well as restoring the beauty behind birth and motherhood.

"For any woman I delivered, I wanted to make sure the experience was positive because that is something you would never forget," Dr. Cunningham said. "You will remember every single moment of that delivery, all the way home. It is an unforgettable moment."

Improving the health of women and children continues to be a priority for DPH. This includes improving access and utilization of perinatal care, reducing transportation barriers, developing a network of community-based perinatal services, increasing access to healthy housing for moms and families and championing safe sleep efforts.

"We are fully committed to advancing birth equity and promoting birthing joy for the region," Dr. Cunningham said.

When women, children and families are healthy, our community is healthy. For additional St. Louis County maternal and child health data please visit the [chronic disease report page](#).



DPH Epidemiologists Pass Certification

The St. Louis County Department of Public Health values its team members and actively encourages them to take advantage of professional development opportunities that are available. This allows employees to sharpen their existing skills while also learning new skills that they can apply to their jobs. Recently, four communicable disease - CD epidemiologists passed their [Certified in Infection Control](#) examination.

Certified individuals are experts at interpreting evidence on infection prevention and control, and act as champions of infection prevention practices. Passing the CIC examination requires mastery of six core competencies or major content areas including, identification of infectious disease processes, surveillance and epidemiologic investigation, preventing/controlling the transmission of infectious agents, employee/occupational health, management and communication (leadership), and education and research. The pass rate of the initial certification exam, which comprises 150 questions, is 58.4 percent.

CIC is a highly regarded certification in the infection prevention and control field. Certification represents the epidemiologist's and DPH's commitment to continual improvement of infection prevention and control practices and their contribution to health care personnel and patient safety. DPH now has seven certified CD epidemiologists and nurses. Please join us in congratulating Jennifer Bradshaw, Amanda Brzozowski, Olivia Chapman and Priya Katti for this awesome achievement.



Fighting the Flu

As the weather begins to get colder, respiratory illnesses like influenza – flu tend to be top of mind for many people. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Symptoms can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, chills, and fatigue (tiredness). Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea. The flu can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to hospitalization or death. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated each year.

The flu vaccine is the strongest tool in the fight against the flu. Vaccination is particularly important for people who are at higher risk of serious complications from influenza. Vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against future infections. The flu vaccine is updated each year and protects against the flu viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

“I strongly encourage everyone to get their flu vaccinations this year,” DPH Director Dr. Kanika Cunningham said. “With this upcoming winter respiratory season it’s important we continue to protect ourselves against the flu in addition to COVID-19 and RSV.”

Other important tools to help you fight the flu include, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home when sick, covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, handwashing, and practicing other good health habits. Using these everyday preventative actions can help stop the spread of germs. If you develop flu-like symptoms and are concerned about your illness, especially if you are at high risk for complications of the flu, you should consult your health care provider.

The health and well-being of St. Louis County is our top priority. DPH offers the flu vaccine through our regular walk-in vaccine clinics at all three health centers Monday through Friday from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Individuals with insurance are asked to bring their insurance card. DPH also publishes [weekly flu surveillance reports](#) for members of the community to stay up to date. For more flu information, visit the [DPH flu webpage](#).