



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

To: Morgan Torell, Administrative Analyst
From: Penny Borenstein, MD, Health Officer/Public Health Director
Date: June 22, 2018
Subject: Department Response to the 2017-18 Grand Jury Report "Safeguarding the Public's Health"

The Health Agency/Public Health Department's Environmental Health Services (EHS) Division is responsible for monitoring, regulating and preventing the occurrence of a wide variety of transmissible diseases and harmful exposures.

The Fiscal Year 2017-18 Grand Jury report focuses primarily on EHS' handling of a particular complaint regarding a single case of Legionnaires' disease. In addition, the Grand Jury investigated and provided feedback related to the EHS Division and Public Health's prevention efforts for Hepatitis A and Zika, two other infectious diseases with heightened interest over the past year or more.

The Grand Jury requires the Public Health Department to respond to Findings 2-6 and Recommendations 1-6. The following are the required responses.

FINDINGS

F2. San Luis Obispo County's Public Health testing laboratory does not have the capability to test for Legionella and must send samples to an out-of-county laboratory.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding. The Public Health Department uses certified laboratories for the testing of clinical and environmental specimens for *Legionella*.

F3. There has been an outbreak of Hepatitis A in several California counties. Hepatitis A can cause death in some cases, especially those with compromised immune systems.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding. Hepatitis A outbreaks are closely monitored by the County's Public Health Department, and Public Health is poised to respond should a similar problem develop in our county.

F4. Mosquitoes carrying Zika virus are in adjacent counties and will soon be in this County.

Response: The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. Zika-carrying mosquito species indeed have been found in adjacent counties. It is however unknown whether Zika-carrying mosquitos will ever reach the County.

F5. There is currently no mosquito abatement (Vector Control) program in San Luis Obispo County. The BoS occasionally reviews that situation but has not authorized funding for an abatement program.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F6. The 2017-2018 Grand Jury reviewed the San Luis Obispo County Public Health Department's website early in the course of its investigation and found the most recent health statistics available were from 2012. However, the website has since been updated to reflect data from 2016. The Grand Jury also found other county health departments update their websites quarterly.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health should require that customers at commercial hot tub and spa establishments be informed there is a risk of Legionnaires' disease inherent in that environment.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Legionnaire's disease can cause a serious type of pneumonia, and the spread of Legionella bacterium is concerning.

State law prescribes the signage that public swimming pool operators are required to post, which includes hot tubs and spas. The department will add links to resource information on public swimming pool safety starting in FY 2018-19, including information on the risks associated with Legionella in swimming pool spas, on the Environmental Health Services Division website.

R2. The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health should use only ELITE Program Laboratories to test for the presence of Legionella when there is a known case of disease potentially associated with the samples.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Public Health Department uses only certified laboratories for the testing of clinical and

environmental specimens for *Legionella*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Environmental Legionella Isolation Techniques Evaluation (ELITE) designation is a voluntary status. Many reputable laboratories choose not to pursue such a designation and yet deliver reliable testing results.

R3. The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health should conduct a vaccination and sanitation outreach program among the homeless population to prevent an outbreak of Hepatitis A in the County. Funding to support the program should be allocated by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented at this time because it is not warranted. Hepatitis A outbreaks are concerning, particularly because it is a highly contagious virus. Though the California Hepatitis A outbreak has been declared over by the California Department of Public Health, a response plan was developed and Public Health staff are poised to respond through vaccination and outreach and education messages should a similar problem develop in our county. However, the County maintains a 5% contingency within its annual budget so that it has the ability to address emergencies or unbudgeted issues that occur mid-year.

The County of San Luis Obispo (SLO) Public Health Department closely monitored the 2017-18 Hepatitis A outbreak that occurred predominantly in San Diego and to a lesser extent in Santa Cruz counties. The California Department of Public Health issued frequent updates and guidance as to which counties met outbreak criteria and should take specific actions to control the outbreak. Routine reporting to our Public Health Department of new cases of Hepatitis A viral infection is ongoing. Should such reports indicate a new outbreak, action would be taken accordingly.

R4. The cost of starting and operating a comprehensive mosquito abatement program (Vector Control) is known. Funding commensurate with that cost should be set aside each year by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors and County Administration, so that when it becomes necessary, the money will be immediately available.

Response: This recommendation has been partially implemented. Funding has been made available for mosquito surveillance but not mosquito abatement. On two occasions, in November 2017 and March 2018, the Board received an analysis of options for re-instating a local surveillance and control program. At the latter of these meetings, the Board voted to delay consideration of reinstating a mosquito control program until the next budget cycle. However, the County maintains a 5% contingency within its annual budget so that it has the ability to address emergencies or unbudgeted issues that occur mid-year.

R5. The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health has a program to educate the public about mosquitoes, how to avoid acting as their host, and how to minimize the risk of becoming infected with the diseases they carry. Before mosquitoes carrying the Zika Virus arrive in this County, additional funding should be allocated by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors to support expansion of EHD's public education efforts.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented, to some extent. The Public Health Department was allocated an additional \$50,000 from the County General Fund, beginning in Fiscal Year 2016-17 to conduct targeted surveillance of *Aedes* species and other types of mosquitoes. The actual expense for the surveillance work has been lower than anticipated such that Public Health has been able to leverage a portion of these resources for staff time to develop public education information. This information has been posted online, including the development of a map based GIS viewer on the Environmental Health Services Division website, some press releases have been developed, information has been shared on social media, and more recently, outreach has been conducted at a local elementary school.

On July 25, 2017, the Public Health Department, at the request of the Board of Supervisors, presented several program and fiscal options for further enhancing mosquito surveillance and/or control. One of those options was to fund an additional \$20,000 for more robust public education activities. Public Health was asked to return to the Board of Supervisors with a focus on restoring a local surveillance and control program. This presentation occurred on November 14, 2017 with no action taken. On March 20, 2018, at the Board's request (after the updated February 2018 financial forecast), Public Health returned to the Board with an option for re-instating a small local surveillance and control program. Due to anticipated Fiscal Year 2018-19 budgetary constraints, the report was received and not acted upon at that time and the Board voted to delay consideration of any mosquito control program efforts until the next budget cycle. However, the County maintains a 5% contingency within its annual budget so that it has the ability to address emergencies or unbudgeted issues that occur mid-year.

R6. The San Luis Obispo County Department of Public Health website's statistics should be updated at least quarterly.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. Posting statistics more frequently than annually could provide incomplete and misleading information to the public. In an effort to present the most accurate and statistically valid data, the Public Health Department often pools multiple years of data to support its findings and to be able to conduct trend analysis.

Cc: Mike Hill, Health Agency Director