Fall/Winter 2025

Public Health FOCUS

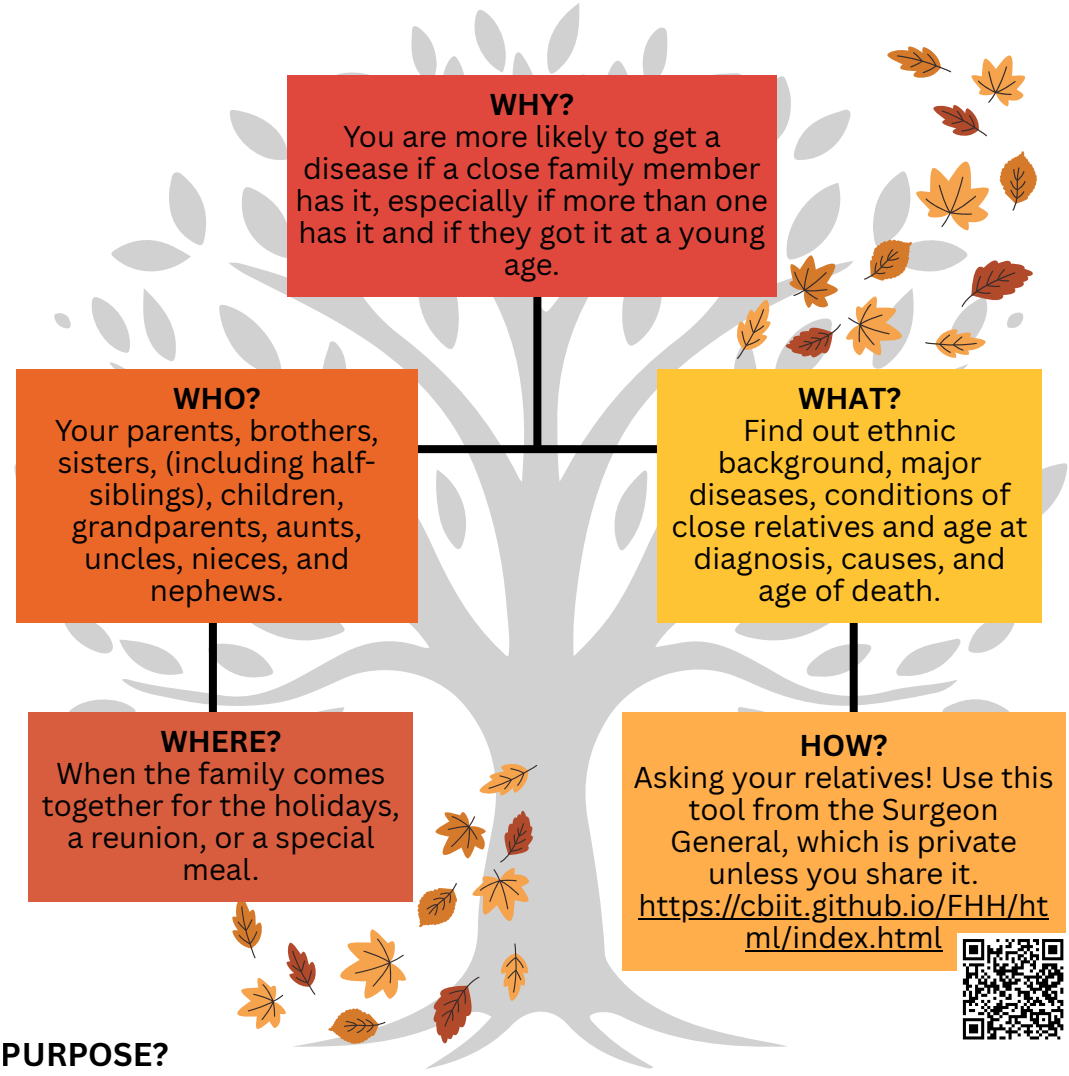
News from the Somerset County Department of Health

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

IN THIS ISSUE

Your Family Health History

Learning about your family's past helps you see where you come from. It also shows health problems that may run in your family.



PURPOSE?

- Show your family health history to your healthcare provider to help your provider determine what screening tests you need and when, such as breast and cervical cancer screening, blood sugar, and blood pressure testing.
- Choose a healthy lifestyle with regular physical activity, healthy eating, and do not start or quit smoking.

For more information, visit:
https://www.cdc.gov/family-health-history/about/index.html
www.genome.gov/research-at-nhgri/Projects/Families-SHARE

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Crisp Air, Clean Hands: Fall into Good Health

Fall brings cozy sweaters, crisp air, colorful leaves, and unfortunately, an increase in cold, flu, and other viruses. As we head into the cooler months, it's the perfect time to take simple steps to protect your health and keep those seasonal germs at bay.

Catch the Fall Vibes, Not a Virus

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a few easy steps to help keep everyone healthy and prevent the spread of illness:

- Stay up to date on vaccines
- Practice good hygiene
  - Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap & water
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes
  - Clean frequently touched surfaces
- Open windows/use air filters when you can to improve air flow
- Wear a mask and add physical distance to provide an additional layer of protection

Feeling Under the Weather?

If you're feeling sick or might have a virus:

- Take steps to avoid spreading it to others.
- See a doctor quickly, especially if you're at higher risk for serious illness. Early treatment helps you recover faster.
  - Antivirals treat viruses like COVID-19 and flu and work best when taken early.
  - Antibiotics treat bacterial infections.
- Stay home and away from others (including people you live with who are not sick) if you have respiratory virus symptoms.

You can return to your normal activities when, for at least 24 hours:

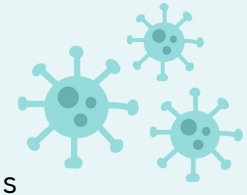
- **Your symptoms are improving, and**
- **You've had no fever without using medicine.**

Groups at higher risk for respiratory illnesses

Anyone can get sick from a respiratory virus, but some people are at higher risk for serious illness:

- Older adults, young children, people with weakened immune systems, people with disabilities, and pregnant and recently pregnant women

Common respiratory viral illnesses



- Flu
- COVID-19
- RSV
- Adenovirus
- Rhinovirus/Enterovirus (common cold)
- Parainfluenza
- Parvovirus B19 (Fifth Disease)

Respiratory Virus Symptoms

- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell
- Headache, muscle or body aches
- Diarrhea
- Weakness

If you have trouble breathing or chest pain, seek emergency medical care immediately.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Don't Let Norovirus Crash Your Fall Fun!

Norovirus is a very contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea. It's sometimes called the "stomach bug" or "stomach flu," but it's **not** the same as the flu. People of all ages can get infected and sick with norovirus. Most people feel better in 1 to 3 days, but they can still spread the virus after they feel better.

How it spreads

Norovirus spreads very easily and in different ways:

- Close contact with someone who's infected, such as caring for them or sharing food or utensils.
- Eating or drinking anything contaminated with the virus.
- Touching surfaces or objects with the virus on them, then putting your fingers in your mouth without washing your hands.

Reminder

Hand sanitizer does NOT work well against norovirus.

Feeling Green? It might be the stomach bug!

It typically takes 12 to 48 hours for symptoms to appear after catching norovirus.

- **Most common symptoms:** diarrhea, vomiting, nausea, stomach pain.
- **Other symptoms:** fever, headache, and body aches.

You are most likely to spread norovirus:

- When you are sick with symptoms of norovirus illness, especially vomiting.
- For the first few days after you feel better.

However, studies have shown that you can still spread the virus for up to 2 weeks after you recover.

IF YOU ARE SICK

Don't prepare food or take care of others. Wait at least 2 days after your symptoms stop before resuming these activities. This is extra important if you work around food or in places like schools, daycares, or care homes, where you could spread the virus to others.

Prevention

- Wash your hands well and often.
- Cook shellfish thoroughly and wash fruits and vegetables.
- Wash laundry in hot water.
- Clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces.
  To kill germs, use a mix of chlorine bleach and water. Use 5 to 25 tablespoons of regular bleach (5% to 8%) in one gallon of water. You can also use a cleaner that is approved by the EPA to fight norovirus.
- Stay home when sick for 2 days (48 hours) after symptoms stop.

Treatment

There's no specific medicine to treat it, and antibiotics won't help because they work against bacteria, not viruses.

Be alert for signs of dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids and get medical help if dehydration becomes severe.

Dehydration can cause serious health problems. If it gets really bad, you might need to go to the hospital to get fluids through an IV.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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Cold Weather, Warm Motivation!

There's no need to take a break from physical activity when colder weather comes around. In fact, exercising in cooler weather can offer unique benefits that you won't get during the warmer months!

- No heat or humidity to deal with—the winter chill may make you feel more awake, energized, and refreshed.
- Cold weather may help you work out longer and burn more calories.
- Exercising in the sun during winter months can improve your mood and vitamin D intake.
- Exercise boosts your immunity during cold and flu season. Just a few minutes a day can help prevent bacterial and viral infections.

The American Heart Association recommends adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week.

Stay Warm & Safe

- **Wear layers** to stay warm and dry to prevent hypothermia and frostbite during cold weather exercise.
  - Your first layer should pull moisture away from your skin, such as moisture wicking fabrics.
  - Next, add a layer of fleece.
  - Finally, add a thin waterproof layer.

- **Stay hydrated!**
  Don't forget to drink plenty of water when exercising in cooler weather.
- **Know the signs of hypothermia.**
  Symptoms can include lack of coordination, mental confusion, slowed reactions, slurred speech, cold feet and hands, shivering, and sleepiness.

Split exercise into shorter sessions! Aim for 30 minutes total per day, 5 days a week. This can mean three 10-minute walks/routines or any combination that fits your schedule.

Learn more about physical activity recommendations for adults and kids!

Outdoor Winter Activities

Move more, with more intensity and sit less during the winter months. Here's some ways to get moving!

- Brisk walking, solo or with your dog
- Hiking
- Jogging/running
- Shoveling snow
- Ice skating
- Sledding/snow tubing
- Snowboarding
- Skiing

Don't Be a Couch Potato!

Cold weather keeping you inside? Don't just veg out—use the time to move and stay healthy! Being physically active can improve your mental and physical health, help you sleep better, and reduce anxiety. Regular physical activity all year round is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

- Home workout circuit
- Dancing
- Housework: cleaning, vacuuming, and sweeping
- Mall walking
- Bowling
- Yoga
- Group classes at your local gym or community center
- Stair climbing

Sources: American Heart Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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Flood Safety: Don't Get Swept Away!

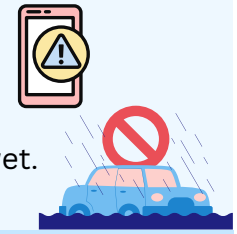
Flooding is the most common natural disaster in the United States - it can be unexpected, scary, and dangerous! Keep yourself and your loved ones safe by being prepared.

Prepare – what action can you take before a threat occurs?

- **Communicate:** Make a plan to stay connected to family and friends in an emergency.
- **Stock Up:** Build an emergency kit with essential items like non-perishable food, drinking water, a flashlight, and medicine.
- **Sign Up:** Emergency and weather alerts provide timely information (phone notifications, TV/Radio/Websites).
- **Stay Informed:** Know your areas flood risk.
- **Know:** Find your evacuation meeting spot and practice multiple routes to get there.
- **Clean:** Weatherproof your home - clean drains and gutters regularly.
- **Document:** Have insurance information on hand and document valuables.

Sign Up for Local Alerts

Act – during a hazard, how can you stay safe?



- **Stay up to date with your local forecast -** monitor weather warnings and alerts.
- **Get to higher ground if you are outside -** follow evacuation orders if necessary.
- **Disconnect electricity and gas utilities -** don't touch electrical equipment if it is wet.
- **Stay in communication -** update your support system as much as possible.

STAY SAFE **Do not walk or drive in flood water! Avoid contact as flood waters can be contaminated with chemicals, waste, and broken objects.**

Recover – take steps to rebuild after a disaster.

After a disaster, tell your family or friends if you are safe or need anything. Check for damage, take pictures, and report it to your insurance company as soon as possible. If flood water entered the home, dry it out as soon as possible to prevent mold.

Recovery Safety Tips

- **Avoid contact with flood water** - stay away from debris and fallen power lines.
- **Wait until it is safe to return to affected areas** - stay updated through local news and alerts.
- **Clean and disinfect surfaces and items that may have been exposed to flood waters** - use gloves and masks when cleaning to prevent exposure to mold, disease, and chemicals.
- **Throw out food that:** was exposed to flood water, wasn't kept cold during a power outage, or looks, smells, or feels strange.
- **Prevent carbon monoxide exposure** - only use generators outside.

Take an active role in your safety - by taking emergency preparedness steps now, you can feel confident that you are ready for any disaster that might occur!

Sources: Ready.gov and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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Follow & like us on Facebook!
@SomersetCountyDOH

On the Web:
somersetcountynj.gov/health

Malaria

Malaria does not regularly occur or spread in the U.S. but about 2,000 cases occur each year. Most of these cases are in people who traveled to another country where malaria is present and became infected before returning to the U.S. Malaria does not spread from person to person, like the common cold or flu.

Malaria spreads through the bite of an infected mosquito, so it's important to protect yourself when traveling.

Before You Travel

- If traveling to an area where malaria spreads, talk with your doctor about medications you can take to prevent malaria.
- Learn about the health risks and precautions for malaria and other diseases for your destination.

While Traveling

- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent.
- Avoid areas with high mosquito activity, especially during late evening and at night.
- Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and pants and socks.
- Keep windows and doors closed and covered with screens to keep mosquitoes out of your house.

- Use 0.5% permethrin spray to treat clothing and gear (boots, pants, socks and tents) or buy permethrin-treated clothing and gear. Do not use permethrin products directly on skin.
- Sleep in a well-screened or air-conditioned room, or sleep under a permethrin-treated bed net.

After Traveling

- If you have a fever or flu-like illness while traveling in an area where malaria spreads or after returning home (for up to one year), seek medical attention immediately.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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