



# *Quick Reads*

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## **Baseline survey of Iowa's governmental public health system**

Many of you recently received my invitation on behalf of the [Public Health Evaluation Committee](#) to complete a survey about your agency's organizational capacity and service delivery. I have been asked why local public health partners should spend time completing this survey, which is a valid question. The answer is that our state does not have comprehensive data on organizational capacity and service provision. Without this data, we cannot identify our strengths as a system or the areas that need improvement. We hope to use the survey results to not only establish a baseline, but also to begin to identify strategies to improve public health in Iowa as a whole. Over time, the information will be used to track system-level improvements. Your input is critical to gathering the information needed to improve Iowa's public health system! The due date for the survey is November 22nd. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact lead staff for the committee, [Erin Barkema](#).

## **Rural Health Day is November 17**

Governor Branstad will sign a proclamation November 17, 2011, designating that day as [Rural Health Day](#), in conjunction with the national observance. National Rural Health Day is an opportunity to honor small towns, farming communities and rural areas, and also to highlight the unique healthcare challenges the individuals who live in these areas face. IDPH recognizes that [rural healthcare](#) needs can't be addressed through a "one size fits all" approach. Because each community is different, programs and policies must be flexible enough to enable rural communities to identify and address the unique needs of their residents.

## **What is Public Health?**

You may be familiar with the [What is Public Health](#) website developed by the [Association of Schools of Public Health](#) (ASPH). It is a great national resource that helps explain exactly what 'public health' is and does. I want to share another exciting tool in this effort created by the [University of Iowa College of Public Health](#). This short [YouTube video](#) cleverly captures the common misconceptions about 'public health' and offers a clear, concise summary of the concept, delivered by none other than University of Iowa football coach Kirk Ferentz. Whether you're a Hawkeye, Cyclone or Panther, you'll agree this video is a 'touchdown' for public health!

### **Preparedness in action**

Two important preparedness events are happening this month. The first, on Wednesday, November 9, is the first [national test](#) of the Nationwide Emergency Alert System (EAS). FEMA, DHS and FCC will conduct the test, which will run concurrently across all time zones and on all radio and TV, beginning at 1:00 p.m. (CST). Nothing like this has ever been conducted in the history of the United States. There is some concern the public will not be aware this is a test and the lack of a message might create panic. Please let your community know about this test, so there is no undue public anxiety.

The second event will occur on Thursday, November 10, which is [Winter Weather Awareness Day](#) in Iowa. The National Weather Service will issue informative public information statements about winter weather, along with safety recommendations. Take time this day to think about how you will prepare and respond to winter this year in Iowa.

### **A Thanksgiving public health reminder**

What does Thanksgiving have to do with public health? Each year since 2004, the U.S. Surgeon General has declared Thanksgiving to be [National Family History Day](#). Becoming aware of and tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders that you might be at risk for, and can empower you to take action to keep you and your family healthy. [My Family Health Portrait](#) is a web-based program that helps users organize family health history information. This information can be shared with other family members, or their family doctor. As you enjoy time with your family this Thanksgiving, I hope you will take time to include a discussion of your family's health history.

### **Local boards of health**

The IDPH [Bureau of Local Public Health Services](#) has distributed updated [Guidebooks](#) to every local Board of Health member in Iowa! More than 500 local Board of Health members have received updated information on their roles and responsibilities, which include supporting the local public health vision and mission, and encouraging

community involvement in setting public health priorities. As volunteers, Board of Health members have the opportunity to affect the health of the communities they serve. Be sure to thank your local board of health members for their service.

### **Congrats and kudos**

The [National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome](#) has recognized Iowa as a 'Purple State' for statewide efforts to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome. I am proud of that IDPH was recognized for this honor, along with partners including Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines, Prevent Child Abuse Iowa, Early Childhood Iowa - HAWC Partnerships for Children, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, St. Luke's Hospital in Cedar Rapids, and Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. The acronym **PURPLE** is used to describe specific characteristics of an infant's crying, and to let parents and caregivers know that what they are experiencing is simply a phase in their child's development that will pass.

Congratulations to Holly Smith and Jolene Carver of the IDPH [Bureau of Chronic Disease Prevention and Management](#), and Jill Lange of the IDPH [Bureau of Nutrition and Health Promotion](#), who recently graduated from the [Great Plains Public Health Leadership Institute](#) (GPPHLI). GPPHLI is a year-long professional development program designed to build and enhance leadership skills for established and emerging leaders in the region's public health systems.

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*To everyone in public health and all our partners, keep up the great work!*

— *Dr. Miller-Meeks*