



# Quick Reads

Dr. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, B.S.N., M.Ed., M.D.  
Director, Iowa Department of Public Health

**January 23, 2011**

## **2012 Legislative session underway**

The [84<sup>th</sup> Iowa General Assembly](#) started its second session on Monday, January 9. Governor Branstad has delivered his [budget recommendations](#) for the FY 2013 state budget, including that IDPH receive a status quo budget for FY 2013, which means no changes are recommended to the budget passed last session.

IDPH's main focus this session will be on a bill focusing on the creation of a statewide health information network, sometimes referred to as [e-Health](#). The bill also provides for components that are critical to the development and operation of the Iowa Health Information Network. As you might imagine, keeping track of legislation and being available to answer legislator's questions about public health-related matters is a daunting undertaking. I'm thankful Deborah Thompson has joined IDPH as Policy Advisor. She serves as public health's eyes and ears at the state capitol. Deborah is also the IDPH [Healthiest State Initiative](#) Coordinator, and will be working closely with the initiative's public and private partners. Look for more information soon about how we in public health will be involved in this important effort.

The [IDPH Legislative Update](#) is posted each week to the IDPH website. To subscribe to the weekly Update, please send a blank email to [join-IDPHLEGUPDATE@lists.ia.gov](mailto:join-IDPHLEGUPDATE@lists.ia.gov).

## **e-Prescribing**

Iowa physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners soon could be sending prescriptions for controlled medications to pharmacies electronically, the same way most doctors now prescribe non-controlled medications for their patients. While Iowa

providers have been recognized for using e-prescribing, it is currently limited to non-controlled medications.

The [Iowa Board of Pharmacy](#) has submitted an administrative rule that would allow Iowa providers to e-prescribe Schedule II through Schedule V controlled medications. These medications account for as much as 20 percent of the total number of medications dispensed by pharmacies nationally. Presently, a doctor must provide a patient with a traditional written prescription for a controlled drug, even if the doctor submits prescriptions for non-controlled medication electronically. Until recently, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration prohibited electronic prescribing of these medications because controlled drugs can be addictive, and because of concerns that electronic prescriptions could be diverted. In 2010, the DEA amended the regulation to authorize states to allow e-prescribing for physicians and pharmacies.

The rule, titled [Electronic Data in Pharmacy Practice](#), must undergo review by a legislative oversight committee. It could take effect as early as April, 2012. Once finalized, it would improve workflows for both the e-prescribing physician and the pharmacist, increasing the time a pharmacist can spend to safely dispense prescriptions and counsel patients on how to take their medications. As more physicians and pharmacists implement e-prescribing for both controlled and non-controlled medications, they will gain access to more complete electronic health records for patients.

### **Mild flu season...for now**

Surveillance by the [Iowa Influenza Surveillance Network](#) indicates low influenza activity in Iowa and across the nation. While this is good news, it is by no means a guarantee or predictor of future flu activity. Testing by the [State Hygienic Laboratory](#) shows the [three identified flu](#) strains circulating this season are in Iowa. The good news is that all of these strains are contained in the influenza vaccine. Since the 'flu' season can last until April, there is still time to get an influenza vaccination to protect against the disease.

Since influenza is among the top 10 causes of death in Iowa, it's important to take this disease seriously. The CDC recommends everyone over the age of 6 months receive the flu vaccine, which is the single best way to protect against influenza.

### **Congrats and kudos**

Mark Vander Linden of the [IDPH Office of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention](#) has been asked to serve on the [National Center for Responsible Gambling](#) (NCRG) Board of Directors. The board is comprised of industry executives, health care executives, and community leaders to provide a practical, hands-on management group for the NCRG. It focuses on education and outreach program creation and implementation. Mark will bring a public health voice to their work.

Congratulations also to the IDPH [Bureau of Immunization & TB](#), the [Office of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention](#), and the [Division of Tobacco Use Prevention and Control](#) for recently being honored by the [National Public Health Information Coalition](#) for excellence in public health messaging.

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

— *Dr. Miller-Meeks*