

Public Health Advisory Committee Report

June 2026

Jessica Darney Buehler, MPH Deputy Director, Director of Health Planning & Promotion

2026 Public Health Partnership Conference April 22-24, 2026 Lake Placid, NY

PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE Leadership from across the state gathered in Lake Placid in April for the Public Health Partnership Conference at which our own Department had an amazing showing.

Two presentations were accepted and warmly received for the conference. *A Behind the Scenes Look: How We Built a Colorectal Cancer Screening Awareness Campaign* was presented by Communications Specialist, **Lindsay Java**. The presentation *WellFed, Well Prepared: How a Local Coalition Responded to the SNAP Delay* was presented by Public Health Outreach Coordinator, **Molly Lawrence**. Both presentations were extremely well received with follow-up requests for more information from other counties. KUDOS to our program staff!



Lindsay Java



Molly Lawrence



Linda Beers, Kristen Sayers, Jessica Darney Buehler

Our Department was also pleased to nominate and have and selected as the recipient of the 2026 Environmental Health Leadership Award, **Kristen Sayers**. Through her steady leadership, collaborative approach, and unwavering commitment to environmental health, Kristen Sayers exemplifies excellence in public service. The NYSDOH Environmental Health District Office is highly deserving of recognition for its impact, and dedication to protecting and promoting public health across the region.

Marketing & Communications

LIVING WELL IN ESSEX COUNTY



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essexcohealthdeptcalendar@gmail.com
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Essex County, NY Health
 Published by Lindsay Sprague-Java · 10h ·

Get ready, #getfitessexcounty! A brand-new fitness challenge is heading your way this month, and we have wellness resources available. 🍌 Two randomly selected participants will receive either a pickleball paddle set or a smart scale just for joining the challenge.

How to enter:
 1. Complete our posted workouts.
 2. Comment on our #getfitessexcounty posts OR tag us in your own post.
 3. Share that you completed the workout and how many rounds you did! 📢

Every workout you complete and log counts as an entry. The selection will be conducted live on Facebook at the end of the month.

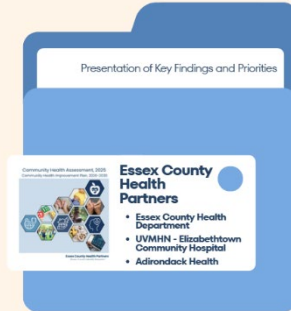
Let us get moving and crush those fitness goals! 🏃🏻‍♀️ See less

#GETFITESSEXCOUNTY



Community Health Assessment and Improvement Planning

Essex County Community Health Assessment 2025 and Community Health Improvement Plan 2026-2030



Key finding and priorities from the 2025 CHA and 2026-2030 CHIP were presented during the April Human Services Committee meeting are being presented at the June PHAC/PAC meeting & to several community coalitions.

Initiatives are being integrated into the work of these coalitions and the work of the Health Dept.

Emergency Preparedness & Response

The **national Preparedness Summit** was attended by two (2) staff (virtually) in April. The annual summit gathers professionals who work in all levels of the government (federal, state, and local), emergency management, volunteer organizations, healthcare coalitions, and academia to share best practices, build partnerships, advance skillsets, and take away innovative solutions and practical strategies to address the vulnerabilities in our country's health security system.

Cooling Centers data was brought up-to current for 2026 and submitted to NYSDOH. Additional plans include collaboration with Office for the Aging and EMS to ensure at-risk populations are aware of existing cooling centers, ask if those centers meet community needs and learn about suggestions for alternative cooling center locations for vulnerable populations.

Plan Updates were made to the *Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Response Plan* and *Emergency Communications Plan* after fruitful internal Health Department meetings and with new leadership at the Essex County Office of Emergency Services.

Coalitions:

Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition

Eastern Boarder Health Initiative

Local Emergency Preparedness Coalition

Communicable Disease

Clinical Laboratory License Reapplication

*Remains in good standing.

Immunization Program Updates

Vaccine Program Compliance Audit-On-site compliance visits are conducted approximately every 2 years. Since taking over this program we have, as a team, continued to improve our plans and practices. I cannot be more proud of our tiny Department and staff. With excellent planning, training & on-site verbal responses to inquiry we received the following notification to our site visit & audit:

"Congratulations: no compliance issues were identified during this visit!"

Annual Training- Staff participated in mandatory training as required and Vaccine Program Coordinator, Back-up Coordinator and Medical Director completed all required training to keep the program in good standing and submitted the program's renewal in May.

Vaccine Storage and Handling Plans along with Scheduling and Billing Policy/Practice Updates have been brought up to date with current best practices and agreed upon protocols with input from staff and using the most current tools & systems available to our team. All recommendations from the site visit are incorporated to continue our process improvement.



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Public Health Unit

Communicable Disease/Outbreaks

Regular Investigations; no outbreaks this quarter.

Flu seasons declared over –mask regulation comes to an end.

Emerging Infectious Diseases – Staff must be aware of key messages & LHD response roles

- Ebola Virus Disease (**Bundibugyo virus**)
- Hantavirus
- HPAI

Hep B Program

Investigations - <10

TB Prevention Program

TB Screening – Health Dept staff and community upon request

Case Investigations/Management - <10 *non-infectious* Latent TB cases

Refugee Health

Referrals/investigations for refugee health – <10

Exposure Prevention

Mask Fit-Testing is offered to some local EMS upon request at our own staff.

The current unit is getting to the end of its value and will not be maintain over 2 more years by the certifying company after this time.

Camp Outreach

Collaboration with our District Office continues as we head into another busy **Camp Season**. There are with 12 overnight & 11 Day camps registered for the 2026 season As the District Office opens up these camps our staff will accompany to cover hot topics that we engage with them with all summer long including communicable diseases and outbreak investigations and potential rabies exposures that occur mostly through bat bites, wildlife contact and dog bites. Staff attended a session with NYSDOH State, Regional, District and local members to review and best understand the regulations pertaining to health, illness management, vaccine-preventable disease management and how all entities work together for healthy and safe camp seasons.

Camps will receive a presentation by our Disease Specialist appropriate for this audience.

Overnight Camps will be “opened” with our District Office and 1-2 of our staff to build the relationship & hand-deliver packets.

Rabies Prevention Program



Clinics offered through spring & summer & program is now very active with clinics, calls, dog bites & investigations.

This program balloons in need during the spring-summer time-frame and can become very time consuming. Staff shifts efforts.

Environmental Health

Air, Water and Food Health & Safety

- Boil Water Notices as shared by NYSDOH Environmental Health District Office are shared/Posted on social media & website

Climate and Health

- Activities will continue – outreach to at-risk populations – see cross-over with Cooling Centers (emergency preparedness)



Family Health

Baby Steps to Bright Futures



* SAVE –THE-DATE for our **second annual Community Baby Shower!** This special event, themed “Locally Grown,” aims to support expecting and new parents with children under 1 by connecting them to local resources, offering education around breastfeeding, safe sleep, car seat safety etc., and strengthening community connections.



Our three Certified Lactation Consultants attended the North Country Lactation Summit where they continued to build their knowledge and skills in breastfeeding support.



Pictured at right:
Elizabeth Terry
Hillary Drake
Emily French

Certified Lactation Consultant Certifications - 3

Little Feeders Circle of Support will be available at WIC clinics & roll out videos in 2026.

Strengthening Oral Health in Our Communities

Public health detailing outreach to healthcare providers included the state of dental health & need for primary care involvement in Essex County. Learning series promoted through outreach to providers. Surveys to be distributed in follow-up to determine if providers attended and if/how they will be making changes to their practices. See attached

School Nurse Stetho-Scoop Monthly Meeting

*Offered once/month while school is in-session these virtual meetings offer a Q & A opportunity for nurses.

School nurse In-service planned for August 26th

School supports:

Pre-K/Kindergarten round-ups this fall to connect with families.

With the highlights of offers to include:

- *School-Required Immunizations Q & A/Child look-up
- *Ages & Stages info & program information on Early Intervention, Preschool & Children & Youth with Special Healthcare Needs
- *Tick-Safety for children & families and * Car Seat Checks

A number of schools have accepted these and our staff are excited to get out there & connect with families!



Car Seat Program

*HIPAA-compliant Car-Seat Check-Form advancing well

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

*Goal remains to initiate a pediatric-friendly lab tech or point of contact or clinic hours at locations throughout the county.

*Outreach to businesses will continue this spring to focus on safe home & business remodeling.

*The program can now lend out & issue safe cleaning supplies!



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Public Health Unit

Sexual & Reproductive Health

Sexual Health/Reproduction continues to classes for many ages, tailored to school requests or accepted as model program. Spring is the busiest time of year for this program as many district like to schedule in the spring.

CAP Pack Distribution –locations are identified throughout Essex County. Program will look for gaps in access in 2026 & determine if/how the program can fill community needs.



BIKE HELMETS In recognition of Bike Safety Month, the Essex County Health Department, in partnership with Safe Kids Adirondack, is providing bike helmets and safety education to Pre-K through 1st grade students in Newcomb, Minerva, Schroon Lake, Keene, and Boquet Valley CSD (all other Essex County schools were served in 2024).

Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms are also included. Each student receives bike safety education and a free, properly fitted helmet!

Promoting Mental Health & Preventing Substance Abuse

Community Opioid Overdose Prevention Program (COOP)

Data analysis continues with marked decrease in opioid-related overdoses. Trends are consistent with regional, state & national data. Finalized NYSDOH agreement for Biospatial data use.

Community Care Kiosks

Community care kiosks remain a popular access point for narcan & other supplies distributed through these no-cost access points. New location in town of North Elba has been identified and a unit will be launched. Located within the town hall near a food pantry it is anticipated to be a well-received access point.

ECHO

The Essex County Health Department serves as the backbone and co-chair of the ECHO (Essex County Heroin & Other) Prevention Coalition in Essex County. ECHO Meetings are set quarterly and continue with strong collaboration in Essex County.

Leveraging this coalition and Opioid Settlement funding, Essex County has been working on campaigns to reframe how we think about substance misuse and addiction here in the North Country.

Overdose Fatality Review

An OFR was conducted March 18th 2026. See summary; attached.

Chronic Disease Prevention



Activities include:

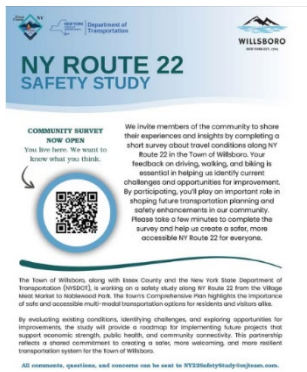
- Efforts are underway to determine if/how emergency food options can be supported for after-hours, weekends and holidays for those with substance use disorders, transitioning families, income-gaps families, etc.

Activities include:

- Vaping Education in Schools (JUUL Settlement funds with Prevention Team) – going well – schools accepting & younger students at risk
- NCCC Smoke Free/Vape Free Tobacco Free Campus Policy – adoption on track for August 2026
- School policies for treatment-focused support of students is on the agenda for 2026
- Vape Prevention Focus Group – surveyed students from three local middle/high schools for development of an anti-vape campaign. The winning campaign has been featured on the billboard in Moriah starting in January of 2026, and utilized for on-going anti-vape messaging.



Active Transportation Engagement



- Various stages of engagement continue with Essex County DPW & Towns of Lewis, Willsboro and Keene
- With the generous engagement of our staff, NYSDOT dollars have been garnered for Essex County to support active transportation & road improvements!

Campaign Highlights

- #GetFitEssexCounty is the standing monthly campaign engaging all in physical activity through our social media outlets
- Monthly campaigns are coordinated based on Health Observances





Policy Updates

ADMINISTRATION

1. Building Use - REVIEWED
2. County Vehicle-REVISED
 - Most current forms for 2026
3. Delegation of Authority-REVISED
 - Most current Organizational Chart 2026
4. Leadership and Governance - REVISED
 - Most current Organizational Chart 2026
5. Policy, Plan and Procedure Staff Requirements - REVISED
 - Emphasized policies that apply to whole Department
6. Website and Social Media-REVISED
 - Denotes where inquiries will come into from the website (Health@EssexCountyny.gov)
 - Specifically describes which extensions to which this Dept will link out to (.gov; .edu; .org)
7. Confidentiality and Disclosure-REVISED
 - HIPAA fillable form to be used and who may release information
 - Consent to use e-mail and Text for the exchange of Protected Health Information
 - How to reporting cybersecurity Information Beaches to NYSDOH
8. Access to Health Records-REVISED
 - Minors revisions to adopt as Dept-wide (not just Homecare)
9. Biospatial Data Access-NEW
 - Policy established procedures for use of EMS data for public health practice
10. Health Commerce System-REVISED
 - Added MRC as an "organization" required to be monitored by ECHD in the HCS
11. Records Retention-REVISED
 - Nurses will give a complete packet of all patient immunization paperwork (including but not limited to Screening Record, Immunization Record, Copy of Insurance Card) to Fiscal Staff for scanning to the patient's electronic Matrix record.
 - Fiscal Staff will scan all documents to **Matrix** file for the patient & mark the packet scanned & then may shred.
 - Any HIPAA forms completed and files sent are to be electronically filed in the patient's **Matrix** record.
 - Records to be handled electronically following the Department's Medical Records, Storage, Security, Retention and Destruction Policy.

CLINICAL SERVICES

12. Administration of Vaccines - REVISED
 - Includes option and procedure for administration of Combination Vaccines
 - Revision to Immunization Record (attachment 2)
13. Vaccine Storage and Handling Plan - REVISED
 - Added Ambient Air Acceptable range & ambient air alarm range
 - Added to include Meet to NYSDOH Childhood Immunization recommendations and schedule
 - Added Monthly testing of Sensaphone alarm
 - Added monthly storage of Backup unit data
 - Added 2x/year annual exercise of Emergency Plan
 - Added Monthly inventory check & order plan update
 - Updated Contacts for Office of Emergency Services - Director & Deputy



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Public Health Unit

14. Vaccine Emergency Storage and Handling Plan - REVISED

- Added back-up unit - Migali Freezer
- Added Ambient Air Acceptable range & ambient air alarm range
- Updated Contacts for Office of Emergency Services - Director & Deputy

15. Vaccine Scheduling & Billing - REVISED

- Change the provider re-enrollment deadline as this is assigned each year by county by NYSDOH
- Update the price list annually with the release of seasonal vaccines
- Update the Sliding Fee Annually at the same time
- Screen for eligibility using updated Patient Eligibility Screening & Immunization Record-process interchange with billing & nursing staff
- Added that Director of Health Planning & Promotion must be notified of all requests for off-location clinics
- Added Records Retention process section of Immunization Record return to Fiscal Staff for addition to Matrix Record Retention

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

16. Fire Drill and Evacuation-REVISED

- Updated to state where files are to be saved for auditing purposes under Article 28

17. Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Response Plan-REVISED

- Removed Plan approval/signatory section (p.1)
- Updated Primary Contact (p.1);
- Added Administrative Preparedness Section (pp. 5-6);
- Updated Maintenance, Review, and Distribution section to reflect current practices (p.6);
- Updated Related Plans, Policies, and Procedures section (p.6);
- Updated Plan flow chart (p.7)
- Updated County Profile section (p.10); Section II Situation Summary:
- Added 2025 CEPA and HVA results; removed 2019 results (pp.11-12)
- Updated references (links) on p.13 Updated roles/titles throughout first portion of document (through page 16).
- Updated Attachment 1 to reflect current Organizational Chart
- Updated Attachment 2 to reflect more current County Profile data

18. Emergency Communications Plan -REVISED

- Complete review & revision/update of communications plan

Staffing Updates

- 1- Principal Account Clerk Vacant
- 2- Outreach Coordinator Vacant
- 3- Senior Receptionist Position (shared Dept-wide)



Fiscal Updates

Grants management

Statewide Financial System:

- Immunization Action Plan
- Lead
- WIC
- Children & Youth with Special Healthcare Needs

Bureau of Communicable Disease Control issues and manages through the Health Commerce System for just:

- Rabies

Office of Health Emergency Preparedness manages grants through Health Research Institute (HRI); including:

- Emergency Preparedness & Response
- Public Health Infrastructure

NYS Governor's Traffic Safety Committee operates their own e-Grants platform for the following:

- Car Seat
- Highway Safety Campaign and activities

New York State Association of County & City Health Officials (NYSACHO) funds

- None at this time

Private funds:

- JUUL Settlement funds – Supports media campaigns and community outreach plus
 - Subcontract with the Prevention Team on evidenced based education in schools
 - Subcontract with Champlain Valley Family Center for retailer compliance checks
- OPIOID Settlement Funds – Supports
 - ECHO
 - Baby Steps to Bright Futures



ORAL HEALTH IN ESSEX COUNTY, NY

Health Care Providers play a critical role in improving oral health outcomes through patient education, preventive care, early intervention, and trusted communication.



3,680:1

There was one dentist per 3,680 people in Essex County (2023)

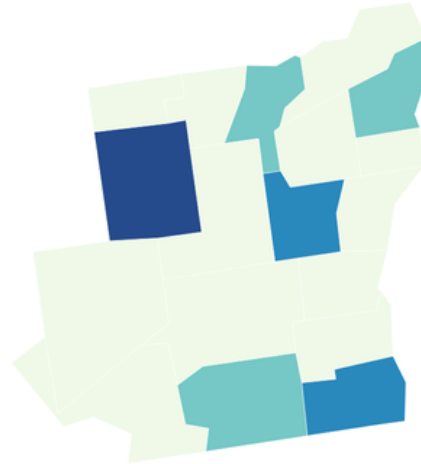
New York: **1,190:1**

United States: **1,340:1**

Number of Dentists by Town

Essex County, NY

0 1 2 3



Created with Datawrapper

NO

Dentists in Essex County accept **Medicaid** or **Child Health Plus**

16.8%

Medicaid enrollees that had at least one preventive dental visit within the last year (2023)

NYS P.A. Objective: 21.3%



46.2%

Medicaid enrollees **aged 2-20** that had at least one preventive dental visit within the last year (2023)

NYS P.A. Objective: 41.1%



There are **no** fluoridated Community Water Systems (CWS) in Essex County. In NYS, about 72% of the population is served by CWS receiving fluoridated water.

The rate of **dental caries** in children 3 - 5 years of age is almost

2X higher

in Essex County than NYS (2022)



Access to dental providers was cited as a **top concern** in the 2025 Community **Survey** of Essex County Residents

Virtual Training Series for Primary Care Providers, Nurses, Clinical Staff, Care Coordinators, Dentists, & Dental Hygienists is available.



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

ESSEX COUNTY OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2nd

March 18, 2026 CASE REVIEW

OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW

The OFR is a collaborative initiative of the Essex County Heroin & Other Coalition with a mission to identify system gaps and community overdose prevention and intention strategies. A shared understanding that overdose deaths are preventable and addiction is a disease to be addressed without stigma and shame guides the entire OFR process. Participants examine a person's demographics, psychosocial history, treatment history, medical records, crisis system encounters, and other prominent risk factors associated with drug overdoses. This identifies missed opportunities for intervention to strengthen overdose prevention strategies, improves system-level operations, informs local service providers, public policy, and ultimately to reduce the number of overdose deaths in Essex County.

METHODOLOGY

Case criteria included a date of death within the 2024 calendar year, a cause of death attributed to overdose of prescription or illicit drugs, and an accidental/ unintentional manner of death. ODMAP data was used for case selection as well as context for identifying an overdose death consistent with a current drug trend of concern (i.e., stimulant and fentanyl-related death, co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder).

The following data was collected and reviewed: • **Decedent demographic data.** Age, sex, race, county of residence, length of residency, veteran status, hospitalization history, incarceration history. • **Circumstances of fatal overdose.** Forensic investigator narrative, first responder reports, toxicology report, Medical Examiner autopsy report, and death certificate. • **Medical history.** Hospitalization history, behavioral health medical provider, substance use treatment provider, medication history • **Case attributes** (decendent risk factors). Diagnosed substance use disorder, mental health diagnosis, multiple emergency department ED/hospital visits, and other factors. • **Next-of-Kin Interviews.** The decendent's relatives were interviewed for their perspective on the decedents, and to learn more about the person, risk factors, and other potential contributing factors.

DEDICATION

Recognizing that each case represents the death of a person whose absence is grieved by family, friends, and community. We dedicate this report to those who have lost their life and to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one to overdose.

KEY FACTORS

The group identified several factors that seemed to contribute to the decendent's addiction and eventual overdose:

- **Limited supervision & lots of free time as a child** - Started using substances at 12
- **Didn't Finish high school** - dropped out in 11 grade. GED while incarcerated
- **Legal labels-** Felt unable to do anything with life once labeled a sex offender
- **No consistent job/ source of income / housing-** This provides a sense of purpose, belonging, well-being, income, etc.
- **Passively suicidal** - Did not care if they were to live or die
- **Bail Reform** - The only time treatment was sought was while incarcerated

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following overdose prevention strategies were recommended for adoption at the system and organizational level:

- Prevention strategies in schools
- Transition plans for incarceration release
 - 988 - easy to remember, can be used anywhere & will connect people to the Alliance or other MH services appropriately
 - Alliance for Positive Health phone number
 - resources for treatment/bridge scripts/MAT
- Follow up with family members using hospice model - checking in 1, 3, & 6 months after death

