

RUTHERFORD BOARD OF HEALTH

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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Thomas Mullahey

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RUTHERFORD HEALTH DEPARTMENT

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

The first two months of the 2020 calendar year started out as prior years, waiting for the March thaw and the department working on setting up screening programs for the spring, i.e., multi-phasic blood screening program, rabies clinic, skin cancer screening program, etc. In addition, planning for the surge of temporary events that normally develops in the spring.

All of those anticipated efforts were sidelined in March with the arrival of the novel COVID-19 virus arriving in the borough. Our first laboratory case of the novel virus was reported to our department on March 18, 2020, and unfortunately that resident also became the first resident to die from COVID-19.

The borough, which should be called the “borough of special events” based on the number of temporary events that take place in the borough involving the serving of food to the public, which is regulated by the health department were cancelled with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in the borough and required re-direction of the department assets to COVID-19 activities. The two public health nurses, who are the contact tracers for the borough, were saturated with COVID-19 cases being reported electronically to the department through the State Health Department Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS).

With the school system closing also to in-person learning in March, the department was still able to receive the full entitlement for providing the nursing services to the two nonpublic schools in town. The state department of education ruled that since the public health nurses were involved with COVID-19 activities, we were eligible to continue to receive the state entitlement. With the schools closed, it was also an asset to the department so the public health nurses could fully conduct contact tracing and provide guidance to borough residents and the governing body.

With so much time and effort needed to be devoted to the pandemic, the department head prepared a two-page memo requesting from the State Civil Service Commission permission to carry over 2019 vacation days into the calendar year 2021, as compared to “using them or losing them before the end of the 2020 calendar year”. The Civil Service Commission granted the request, which took a burden off the department and allowed us to devote more time on pandemic issues.

With borough offices closing shortly after the arrival of the pandemic, the department was able to continue serving the public with counter services by establishing a drive-up system to obtain health department documents, i.e., certified copies of birth, marriage, and death records. Since the front entrance to our building is approximately 12 feet from the curb line, we were able to have customers pull up in their car in front of the building, remain in their car and transact business. The department hand delivered certified copies of death certificates to the two local funeral homes.

The Department Head, along with the Mayor and Superintendent of Schools, taped a 22-minute video in the high school T-V studio for the public to review, which was reported to have been seen by over 4,000 residents on the pandemic and the interaction of the borough and board of education.

The number of laboratory cases of COVID-19 for residents from March 8, 2020 to December 31, 2020, was a total of 838 cases.

The Department maintained accurate records on time spent on COVID-19 activities from March through December, which were forwarded to the borough administrator for possible reimbursement under the federal CARES legislation.

This reporting period marked the 29th year of rabies in land-based animals in Rutherford. This continued to result in an increase in manpower hours being devoted to rabies control measures and follow up on 10 animal related bites to humans and other animals. The department continued to receive excellent service and cooperation by the Governing Body contracting once again in 2020 for a private animal control service. This decision not only realized the borough an increase in field related animal control services, but at a time when it was continually needed within the community in the rabies enzootic area. We had one raccoon and one cat test positive for the deadly rabies virus. In addition, one cat, one dog, and three bats that were sent for rabies testing all tested negative for rabies. Four residents received post exposure treatment for rabies.

For the 26th consecutive year, the Board of Health was able to apply for reimbursement for those residents 65 and over who were Medicare patients and were vaccinated against influenza through a shared services agreement with the Bergen County Department of Health Services.

The department continued its role in the School Nursing Program. For the 2019-2020 School Year, the Public Health Nurses continued the School Nursing Services at The Academy at St. Mary and St. Mary High School.

Since 1992, state entitlement per pupil is available for providing nursing services to the non-public school students by the health department through a shared services agreement with the Rutherford Board of Education. This resulted in reimbursement of \$32,495.00 for the 2019-2020 school year.

By continuing our role in the school-nursing program, it required at a minimum, the Public Health Nurses, when schools are in session, to devote an additional five (5) hours a day on this program. 335 students received our services in the 2019-2020 school year. On-site services were provided until the schools closed in March and went virtual.

For the 2020 calendar year, a number of specific items are in need of noting:

The Department investigated 362 of the 379 citizen complaints received during this reporting period. The county health department charges \$140.21 for each complaint handled. The Department Head saved the borough \$50,756.02 through his efforts.

Board members Dennis Goumas, Ellery Tarife, and Deborah O'Neill were appointed to three-year terms on the Rutherford Board of Health by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the Governing Body. Mrs. Lauren Connallon, was appointed Alternate Board Member #1 and Mr. Vincent Silvestri was appointed as Alternate Board Member #2 to the Rutherford Board of Health.

Councilman Tom Mullahey was appointed our council liaison.

The Department Head continued to serve as the bloodborne pathogen coordinator for the Borough.

West Nile Virus activity in the Borough was very quiet in 2020. This was the 14th consecutive year, since 2000 when the virus appeared in the State that we did not have a crow test positive for the West Nile Virus. The Department did reach out to 17 service stations in town regarding the issue of stagnant water associated with discarded vehicle tires.

The Department had to hire a private landscaper to cut overgrowth on several properties in town when the property owner failed to respond to written notice provided. Several liens on the properties for the cost of the clean-ups were placed by the Governing Body on the properties in question. Overgrowth on properties were abated by the health department on the following private properties: Carmita Avenue, Grand Avenue (both properties abated of overgrowth twice), Woodward Avenue, Donaldson Avenue.

The health department completed a review of records retention and after approval from the state, we were able to destroy several boxes of records.

The staff participated in numerous conference calls with the county health department throughout the reporting period concerning COVID-19 issues.

The office was able to arrange for in-house CPR training for the two public health nurses.

We recorded one in-home birth during this reporting period.

Influenza vaccination clinics for the 2020-2021 influenza season were held on October 19th and October 23, 2020 with 200 residents vaccinated against the flu.

Access to Open Public Records Act requests, known as OPRA requests, increased to 125 requests, 779 pages of health department documents, and one CD. One person made a request for 187 pages of documents.

The Department spent a considerable amount of time investigating animal bites to humans and to domestic animals. This was a very time intensive activity. Five animals (one cat, one dog, and three bats) were sent by the Department to the State Health Department Rabies Lab outside Trenton, NJ to rule out rabies. While 10 animal bites to humans were followed up on, some being problematic, four residents did receive post exposure treatment, which now involves four inoculations over a 14-day period of time. Since rabies is a fatal disease, proper follow up and documentation in a timely manner is imperative.

The board of health had updated its retail food establishment license fees in 2019 with general increases of 10% in 2020 and an additional 10% in 2021.

The Department continued to be involved with the Bureau of Fire Safety and the Social Service Director with hoarding conditions inside dwelling units. Most of these complaints come to the department from the police department while responding to service calls at a particular address. The American population is aging and a number of these types of complaints involve elderly citizens who are residing in an owner/occupied residence.

Department worked on the issue of a rodent problem, caused by the construction project at Orient Way and the North Service Road. Numerous residents in the area were complaining about rats on their properties. The department was able to set up five enclosed bait stations with rodenticide and over the course of several months, re-locating the bait stations, the rodent problem was eradicated.

An additional rodent problem was noted on Riverview Avenue and once again the department was successful in abating this rat issue also with the set-up of some enclosed bait stations in the neighborhood.

The Department Head continued to serve on a host of Borough appointed committees during the calendar year, i.e., Safety Committee, Local Emergency Planning Committee, The Office of Emergency Management, Bloodborne Pathogen, and Special Events Committee.

Seven new and/or changed in ownership retail food establishments opened in 2020. Those establishments are located at: 300 Union Avenue, 73 Park Avenue, 201 Route 17, 65 Park Avenue, 15 Park Avenue, 17 Park Avenue, and 70 Park Avenue.

The board of health continued with a number of shared services in 2020, including, blood borne pathogen program, influenza vaccination program, nonpublic school nursing program and an administrative/infrastructure contract with the county.

The Borough received \$ 32,495.00 in state aid for the Department providing the nursing services at St. Mary High School and the Academy at St. Mary, covering 333 students. This was accomplished without adding staff.

The following is a breakdown of activities for each component of the Health Department:

2020 VITAL STATISTICS

- 3,227 - Certified Copies of Death, Marriage, Domestic Part., & Birth Records Issued
- 1,887 – Electronic Certified Copies of Death Certificates Issued
- 236 - Death Certificates Processed (201 electronic & 36 photocopied)
- 99 - Marriage Licenses Issued
 - 1- Re-Marriage Occurred in Rutherford
 - 44- Death Certificates Recorded for Deaths Occurring in Rutherford
 - 74 - Marriage Certificates Filed in Rutherford
- 145- Residents Died During 2020
 - 1- Birth Occurred & Recorded in Rutherford

\$1,827.000 in revenue was received for certified copies of Marriage, Birth, Death Records, Civil Union, Domestic Partnership Affidavits, Burial Permits and Marriage Licenses plus electronic payments of \$9,285.00 - (Vital Statistics - \$1,827.00 + Electronic Payments - \$9,285.00 = \$11,112.00.

From a budget and finance standpoint, the Board of Health realized a total revenue source of \$63,993.00. The largest sums were in the school nursing reimbursement account totaling \$32,495.00, retail food establishment licenses totaling \$26,656.00, vital statistics revenue totaling \$1,827.00, state shared license fees \$2,475.00, and electronic vital statistics revenue totaling \$9,285.00.

2020 BUDGET & FINANCE

- Operating Budget - \$29,560.00
- Salary & Wages Budget - \$ 329,000.00
- Capital Budget - \$ 0
- Animal Control Services - \$24,000.00
- County Health Department Shared Services - \$78,898.46

The Health Department brought in the following revenue:

| | |
|--------------|--|
| \$32,495.00 | School Nursing Reimbursement (2019-2020 School Year) |
| | State Shared License Fees |
| 26,656.00 | Retail Food Establishment Licenses |
| 2,475.00 | State Shared License Fees |
| 1,827.00 | Vital Statistics |
| 520.00 | Vending Machine Licenses |
| 20.00 | Store Milk Licenses |
| | |
| \$ 63,993.00 | Total Revenue |

Note - (\$9,285.00-Electronic Payment Total for 2020 not added to above total revenue)
\$63,993.00 + \$9,285.00 = \$73,278.00 (2020 Final Revenue Total).

ADULT SCREENING PROGRAMS

| | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| Blood Screening: | Cancelled – COVID-19 |
| Flu Clinic: | October 19, 2020 |
| | October 23, 2020 |
| | December 2020 - 8 |
| | Total Flu Participants - 208 |
| Pap Program: | Cancelled – COVID-19 |
| Rabies Clinic: | Cancelled – COVID-19 |

PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING

| | |
|--|-----|
| COVID-19 Contact Tracing Cases | 838 |
| Blood Pressures | 21 |
| Communicable Disease Follow-up | 32 |
| Health Risk Assessments | 14 |
| Immunization Audits | 14 |
| Immunization Enforcement Follow-up | 4 |
| TB Testing (2 reactors) | 39 |
| Monitored elevated lead cases and investigated | 1 |
| Cardiovascular Assessments | 4 |
| Nutritional Assessments | 12 |
| Heights and Weights | 10 |
| Diabetic Education | 2 |
| Home visits for lead investigations | 1 |

SCHOOLS

Complete IMM 8's & A45's (immunization charts) for all students according to New Jersey State Department of Health & Senior guidelines.

Provide health screenings according to New Jersey State Department of Health & Senior Services guidelines for the following:

St. Mary High School - 248 Nursing Hours 2019-2020

The Academy at St. Mary – 192 Nursing Hours 2019-2020

Continuing Education – Seminars & Webinars for Continuing Education Credits throughout the year – 15 Continuing Education Credits for Public Health Nursing & 15 Continuing Education Credits for Nursing Licenses.

Audits and surveys of public and private schools and 13 daycare centers and eight (8) schools in the borough concerning Immunization Compliance with Chapter 14 of The State Sanitary Code.

Complete School Nursing Program at St. Mary High School and The Academy at St. Mary covering over 333 students. Programs cover such things as auditing and maintenance of health records and immunizations, tuberculin testing, health screenings which include vision, hearing, scoliosis, heights and weights, first aid to ill and injured students and faculty, student health counseling, etc. At least five (5) nursing hours are spent each day on programs when schools are in session. On-site services were provided until the schools closed in March and went virtual.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE FOLLOW-UP

In 2020, the public health nurses followed up with 870 residents regarding a communicable disease. In 2019, the number was 63.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The bulk of the food related inspections and those of the daycare centers, public recreational facilities, pet shop, tanning establishment, kennel inspections, etc., and plan review and citizen complaints received regarding those establishments were outsourced to the county health department.

CITIZEN COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION

The department handled a large segment of the citizen complaints received during this reporting time period. Of the 379 citizen complaints received from the public, 362 complaints were followed up and investigated by the Rutherford Health Department. The county handled 16 complaints and Tyco Animal Control handled one complaint. It should be noted that the volume of citizen complaints logged by the department might be lower than the actual number received, since it is unsure if all of the citizen complaints handled by the county health department were logged into the citizen complaint numbering and tracking database maintained by our department.

STAFFING ISSUES

The board of health and department head continue to express serious concerns about the continuity of services at the health department based on outsourcing of the registered environmental health (REHS) position. Currently two of the employees, (half of the current staff) who are key employees, are both eligible for retirement. One employee has completed 42 years of service and the other 33 years with the borough. There has been a 37% reduction in staffing levels in the department. Each and every employee in the health department has required licensing or certification requirements unique to their positions as compared to many of the other borough employees. Each health department employee handles various responsibilities outside their job title in order to allow the department to function properly and provide the essential public health services to the residents. The essential operations of the department have the potential of being seriously compromised by the current staffing arrangements.

FACILITY ISSUES

The health department operation has been housed in the municipal annex since 1981. For the last 39 years, the current facility continues to meet our needs to provide public health programs to the residents of Rutherford. Our section of the municipal annex is in very good shape and has not been a burden to the borough in maintenance costs. For example, over the last 39 years, only the carpeting and the HVAC unit have had to be replaced in the facility, in addition to a backflow preventer being installed on the main sewer line to the building. The facility, while 39 years old, is the third newest facility owned by the borough. The facility has been used for meetings by other committees in the borough due to its handicapped capabilities and is used during multiple special events held in Lincoln Park so the public has access to restroom facilities. With the construction of a new police department facility planned to commence in 2020, there have been no discussions with the board of health as to what the status of the municipal annex will be and if the health department will continue to occupy the municipal annex, and if not, what is the plan for a suitable other location for public health activities.

CLOSING REMARKS

This report is a credit to the members of the Rutherford Board of Health for their insight and support of the Staff in providing a public health program designed to meet the needs of the Community. Board members serve on the Board of Health to fulfill the statutory responsibility of a local board of health and receive no compensation for devoting their time and talent to the Borough of Rutherford.

The Governing Body of the Borough of Rutherford needs to be commended for continuing to provide an acceptable and reasonable level of funding to the Board of Health in order that public health needs and mandates can be successfully achieved.

A special thanks needs to be extended to the Borough Administrator who was instrumental in resolving a host of outstanding board of health issues during this reporting period. His assistance was gratefully appreciated by the staff and board of health members.

As this report concludes the 21st year of the 21st century for the Rutherford Health Department, many major dramatic health threats have been eliminated since the turn of the 20th century which have contributed to the increase in the average life span since the early 1900's by over 30 years, 25 years attributable to advances in public health.

Yet this year we were faced with a worldwide pandemic with the COVID-19 Virus, something the world has not seen since the Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918. By the end of December 2020, over 19,005,793 Americans were infected with the virus and 326,867 Americans have died from COVID-19.

Local public health continues to adjust to changes in the public health infrastructure since the local board of health was created by the Governing Body back in 1901, with all of the powers and duties delegated to the Board by acts of the State of New Jersey Legislature. The Board of Health continues to take the lead by partnering with other governmental agencies in shared services agreements. In 2020, the Board had a shared service contract with the Bergen County Department of Health Services for public health infrastructure and administration, direct nursing supervision, influenza vaccination reimbursement through Medicare Part B and blood borne pathogen training and immunization for employees.

The Board also continued with a shared service contract with the Rutherford Board of Education, providing nursing services to two of the nonpublic schools in town, realizing the Borough a revenue source of \$32,495.00. In addition, the Board continued to encourage the Governing Body by contracting with a private animal control service, providing the borough with additional services.

The staff looks forward to working with the board in the 2021 Calendar Year in continuing to provide a sound and robust public health program to the residents of Rutherford. Working with a continued tight budget framework and a continued reduction in staffing, the 2021 year should continue to pose some unique challenges to the staff and Board of Health.

Respectfully Submitted
For The Board of Health,

Brian M. O'Keefe
Administrative Officer
Registrar of Vital Statistics
Bloodborne Pathogen Coordinator
Rutherford Health Department