



# Oregon Public Health Connection

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## TOP PRIORITY:

### Interim Public Health Director; New Oregon State Public Health Laboratory



Michael R. Skeels

*By Michael R. Skeels, PhD, MPH  
Interim Public Health Director, DHS*

We all know that public health is a collaborative endeavor that relies on the talents and contributions of many partners. Given our limited resources, no individual organization, agency, or program can accomplish its work in isolation. We are interdependent, and from our collective efforts we create the great synergy of public health. I want to thank each of you for what you do every day to build this partnership and to promote the health of our communities. Because of Susan Allan's departure, a national recruitment for a new State Public Health Director is underway, and I've been serving on an interim basis since February 1.

Although we won't have a new Director for a few months, we need to keep moving forward and building upon the many accomplishments under Dr. Allan's leadership. In fact, I believe we are in a pivotal period for public health in Oregon, and find ourselves faced with "insurmountable opportunities."

As you know, many local health departments are dealing with serious financial threats, and there are gaps and inconsistencies in statewide public health services. Federal funding for some basic programs is also in jeopardy. However, we also have strong support to improve Oregon's public health system and its funding base, as long as we do so in a way that assures quality, efficiency, and accountability. We are working closely with the Conference of Local Health Officials to assess the current public health system, the existing gaps in services and funding, and what it would take to fill these gaps. You will be hearing more about this from the leadership of CLHO, and I will also provide more information as things develop.

#### New home for the OSPHL, but same mission

In real life, I'm the Director of the Oregon State Public Health Laboratory, which supports the communicable disease control efforts of state and local public health programs, screens newborn infants for metabolic, endocrine, and hemoglobin disorders, and regulates 2,400 medical and environmental laboratories. After 30 years in the same location in downtown Portland, our laboratory recently moved to a new facility in Hillsboro. We're pleased that we accomplished this move with no interruption in service to our clients.

Although OSPHL has a new home, its mission is still the same -- protecting the public's health, as it has for the past century. When the lab opened its doors in 1903, health concerns of the day were smallpox outbreaks and water and milk contaminated by typhoid and tuberculosis bacteria. The scope of public health has evolved since those early times, but the mission remains -- to provide and assure quality laboratory services throughout Oregon and the Northwest region.

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### Changes in HIV Reporting – Reportable by Name in Oregon



In April 2006, HIV infection became reportable by **name** in Oregon. Most of the reports come from laboratories with only minimal information. A follow-up with physician offices is necessary to get the complete case information. This had been done by state public health previously.

In November 2007, after the Oregon Public Health Division HIV Program staff conducted trainings for local health departments around the state, local public health departments began collecting this follow-up information. Similar to other reportable diseases, staff from the local health department or the state HIV Program began to interview all patients with newly reported cases of HIV/AIDS to verify case details and offer services such as partner counseling and referrals to health care.

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## Resources in other Languages

Health-Related Materials Available to Counties for Spanish-Speaking Clients

[PH Spanish Glossary, 7th Ed.](#)

## Partner Links

[Children's Dental Health, pg. 10](#)  
Oregon Department of Education

## PH: In the News

[TB Update, Feb. 08: Wash. Co](#)  
County Health Department concludes investigation of TB Exposure at Aloha High School.

[Health Equity: Mult. Co](#)  
Information on Multnomah County Health Department's Health Equity Initiative, including research, education, and action items.

[Hank Collins: Jackson Co](#)  
Tribute to Hank Collins, former HHS Director for Jackson County.

[Satellite Re-Entry Alert: Marion Co](#)  
Link to CDC provided information about satellite re-entry and hydrazine.

## Contact Us



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Oregon Public Health Connection is a monthly e-bulletin produced jointly by the Oregon Public Health Division and the Conference of Local Health Officials (CLHO).

To provide information, email:  
[PH.COUNTYBULLETIN@state.or.us](mailto:PH.COUNTYBULLETIN@state.or.us)

Are you interested in being part of the PH State-County Bulletin Editorial Board? The Oregon Public Health Connection will be establishing a group of county-state public health professionals in 2008 to help direct the monthly bulletin. For more information contact Trish Neiwirth, Community Outreach Coordinator, Community Liaison, [trish.neiwirth@state.or.us](mailto:trish.neiwirth@state.or.us)

## Update on Changes in HIV Reporting, continued from page 1

### **Why were these changes made?**

Objectives of the revamp were to improve timeliness and quality of HIV case reports, invest local health departments in the real time epidemiology of HIV within their jurisdiction, and increase the number of newly diagnosed patients offered partner counseling and testing and early referrals to services. On average, for every 10 new HIV patients interviewed and HIV testing of partners, one additional new case is discovered earlier than it would have been diagnosed without active case finding.

### **How are things going so far?**

No formal analysis is available yet on reporting delay but early reports from state staff indicate that local health personnel are turning most of these cases around within a day or two and referring them on for partner counseling. Some counties have been particularly energetic about this new opportunity to conduct important public health work. (See below.) Data confirm increased numbers of face-to-face (or cell phone-to-cell phone) interviews with new case-patients from an average of approximately 80 per year to over 140 in 2007 and 16 during January of 2008, a rate that projects to indicate to almost 200 interviews and referrals each year.

*Information provided by Sean Schafer, Oregon Public Health Division, DHS, HIV Program, [sean.schafer@state.or.us](mailto:sean.schafer@state.or.us) If you have questions or your county has yet to tackle HIV case reporting, please contact the state HIV Program at 971-673-0153 for more information.*

## County Perspective: HIV Reporting, Marion County Experience

Since the Marion County Health Department assumed HIV Reporting in November 2007, the experience has been a good one. Our concern that it might result in a lot of extra work for staff has not been borne out. Thus far, we have completed three HIV Case Reports on non-health department cases. Another new case was reported from the Oregon State Penitentiary and we are awaiting further direction from the state as to how to proceed with that one. In addition to the four new cases, labs for five previously reported HIV Cases were also reported to the Health Department. All completed new HIV/AIDS Case Report forms are faxed to the state HIV Data and Analysis staff. We also enter the information on a secure Excel Spreadsheet at the Health Department. The HIV Reporting process has helped build health department and provider relationships. The conversations with them provided an opportunity for us to let them know in a timely manner about services available to patients who are HIV positive such as Partner Notification and HIV Case Management Services.

*Information provided by Karen Helikson, MS, CHES, HIV Reporting, Marion County Health Department, 503-361-2659.*

## Interim Director, New Public Health Lab, continued from page 1



**New OSPHL**

Today, OSPHL's core functions include: communicable disease testing, newborn screening, rapid laboratory response to public health emergencies, and regulation of clinical and environmental laboratories.

### **Improved services, increased efficiencies, safer workplace**

In January 2008, after two years of planning and construction, OSPHL moved into a 45,000-square-foot laboratory, co-located with the Laboratory and Environmental Assessment Division of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. The new facility will allow OSPHL to improve its services to the public, operate more efficiently, and provide a safer workplace for laboratory employees.

Safety and energy saving features include: a Biosafety Level 3 laboratory, specialized hoods for work on highly infectious organisms and toxins, sealed surfaces to contain leaks and spills, meeting or exceeding the LEED Silver rating, and timed motion detector lights, among other items. The OSPHL is accredited by the College of American Pathologists, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the CDC Select Agent Program.

### **Working everyday with state and local health programs**

The OSPHL supports state and local public health programs through testing, consultation and emergency response. OSPHL works closely with the PHD Office of Disease Prevention and Epidemiology and the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Among its accomplishments, the OSPHL: conducts 9 million tests on 450,000 samples per year, regulates 2,400 clinical and environmental laboratories, receives samples from more than 3,000 clients in six states, annually, and performs highly specialized testing on hazardous microbes and toxins in its new Biosafety Level 3 facility. For more information about utilizing laboratory services, please contact OSPHL Client Services Coordinator, Terry Crandall, 503-693-4124, [terry.crandall@state.or.us](mailto:terry.crandall@state.or.us)

*For reports or questions concerning unusual infectious disease outbreaks, local health department staff should call the State Acute and Communicable Disease and Prevention in Portland at 971-673-1111 -- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.*