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COMMUNITY
HEALTH

NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION



BARNSTABLE COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT



Welcome to the winter edition of the Barnstable County Community Health Newsletter!

In this edition, we discuss important public health issues impacting Cape Codders as we muddle through these winter months, such as the latest updates and advice regarding COVID-19, the ever evolving wastewater debate, rabies prevention, upcoming seasonal employment opportunities at the County, health tips and more!

Also, in our fall newsletter we included a poll asking our readers which local public health issues, programs, and services were most important to them, so that we could gear our content to community needs and preferences. We received some excellent feedback and want to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who participated. We hear you and we plan to deliver consistent quality public health information to our readers Cape-wide!

Also, we have some exciting Department news: we are thrilled to announce that on February 1st, 2023, the Barnstable County Assembly of Delegates approved \$5.4 million in American Rescue Plan Act Funding to be used for Department programs and services that will serve to improve environmental and public health on Cape Cod.



The list of approved projects pertaining to Department offerings are as follows:

- Community Health Nursing Program Needs Assessment - \$285,000
- Contract Epidemiologist - \$60,000
- County Clean Water Finance Center - \$257,345
- Emergency Preparedness Upgrades - \$399,114
- Regional Water Initiative Management - \$257,345
- Water Quality Laboratory Enhancements - \$1,266,481
- Harmful Algal Bloom Assessment and Monitoring - \$237,526
- Innovative/Alternative Septic System Responsible Management Entity - \$672,873
- Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Technology Center (MASSTC) - \$1,383,086
- PFAS Identification and Analysis Program - \$829,086

Our Public Health Nursing Division continues to encourage everyone ages 6 months + to get their annual flu vaccine and be up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters. Respiratory viruses (flu, COVID-19 variants, and RSV) are proving to be severe and prolific this 2023 season, resulting in an uptick in hospitalizations nation-wide. Vaccinations, in addition to good hand washing practices, social distancing measures, and staying home while sick are the best ways to prevent spreading harmful germs.

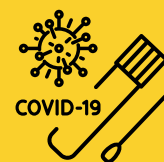
Finally, in addition to vaccination, home testing is one of the best tools we have to stop the spread of COVID-19. Stock up on COVID-19 home tests and use them before family gatherings, ESPECIALLY if you're not feeling well or think you could have been exposed to someone who is sick.



**Updated Bivalent Boosters
are now available for
everyone ages 6 months
and older.**

[CLICK HERE to learn more >>](#)

**Home Testing
Resources on
Cape Cod**



[CLICK HERE to learn more >>](#)

COVID-19: IT'S STILL OUT THERE, IT'S STILL SERIOUS, AND IT'S NOT ALONE

Public Health Nursing Staff

People often ask “Do I really need the new bivalent COVID-19 booster?” or “I’ve already had COVID-19, so I have natural immunity and can’t get it again, right?”. The truth is, you CAN get COVID-19 again, and YES you are better protected once you have received the new bivalent COVID-19 booster. As a matter of fact, according to the CDC COVID-19 Data Tracker, people who do not receive the bivalent booster have an 18.6X greater chance of dying from COVID-19 than those who did not.

The COVID-19 bivalent booster was available to individuals 12 years and older as of September 2, 2022, to children five to eleven years as of October 12, 2022, and to children six months to four years on December 9, 2022. Unfortunately, only 29% of all Massachusetts residents have received their bivalent booster.

COVID-19 is not the only virus we have to worry about this cold and flu season. According to experts, along with numerous COVID-19 variants, the flu continues to infect people nationwide, and more than 200 other viruses can cause symptoms associated with the common cold. Many of us can struggle through these illnesses without long term effects. But others, specifically the elderly, can have lifelong impacts. For example, a prolonged recovery time—and the bed rest that can go with it—comes with an increased risk for a cadre of complications, from loss of muscle mass and strength to prolonged immobility and falls, leading to a potential downward spiral. That’s true for

COVID-19, the flu and even the common cold.

“Trying to fight your way back to where you were before can be a tremendous battle,” says Magdalena Bednarczyk, M.D., section chief of geriatric medicine at Rush University Medical Center. “For a fit, younger adult, a common cold or the flu could be an inconvenience. For a frail older adult, it can literally knock them off their feet,” she says.

So what can we do to stay healthy during the difficult winter season besides isolate ourselves and wait for the warmer weather to return? Here are a list of frequently asked questions to help you navigate these cold weather months.

I’m tired of COVID-19 booster shots; it feels like there’s a new one every few months. Will it ever end?

Cameron Wolfe, M.D., an infectious disease specialist at the Duke University School of Medicine says that it’s likely COVID-19 boosters will become an annual routine. “The goal is to get into a pattern that’s similar to the once-a-year flu shot, where companies can modify the vaccine to stay up to date on whatever variants are floating around at the time. Ideally, we are looking at a situation where they are combined with the flu shot to make it easy,” Wolfe notes “but we’re not there yet because, unlike the flu, COVID-19 is still a year-round threat.”

COVID-19

(Continued)

How can I help my immune system naturally?

“There are no injections or vitamins that will produce a supercharged immune system,” says infectious disease expert Lawrence Livornese, M.D., chairman of the department of medicine at Main Line Health System. “Not smoking, not drinking excessively, exercising regularly, preventive immunizations and following a healthy diet are your best bets.”

Beyond vaccines, what’s considered the best protection against COVID-19?

Panagis Galiatsato, M.D., an assistant professor of pulmonary and critical care medicine at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, recommends keeping two tools at your disposal: rapid tests and well-fitting masks.

Per CDC: Individuals may choose to wear a mask at any time. Masks are recommended in indoor public transportation settings.

- **Stay up to date** on vaccination, including recommended booster doses.
- Maintain **ventilation improvements**.
- If you are at **high risk of getting very sick** wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., N95) when indoors in public.

Further, testing ahead of large gatherings and after exposure can help identify infection so that you don’t spread it to loved ones. And remember, the test you have on hand is the test you will use.

You can order free COVID home test kits from the Federal government via the United States Postal Service or call your local town hall to check availability. Additional testing resources are listed on the **Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment website.**

With all this at-home testing, how do we know if COVID-19 is increasing or not?

For a truly accurate statistic, look at **hospitalization rates**. If the number is rising in your region, COVID-19 is on the rise and your caution level should be as well. Hospitalizations tend to spike in winter. The weekly Community Risk Level on Barnstable County’s website **Case Numbers and Figures - Barnstable County (capecod.gov)** factors this in as one of its determinants.

I’ve already had COVID-19 once. Is it possible to get it again?

The short answer is: yes, it is possible. Think of COVID-19 as like a supercharged common cold; coming down with it once doesn’t mean you can’t get sick again. “The virus changes enough over time that the immune response you develop against one version is enough to protect against serious illness but not from developing another infection,” says Steven Lawrence, M.D., Washington University infectious disease specialist at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. “And every new infection brings new risk of complications—including **long COVID**. Getting the bivalent vaccine helps protect you from further mutations of the original virus.

COVID-19

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Should I ask for antivirals if I test positive for COVID-19?

Yes, especially if you are over 65 years of age. “Early treatment with Paxlovid or Lagevrio [another antiviral] can keep individuals out of the hospital and minimize the risk of death,” says Thomas Tsai, M.D., senior policy adviser for the White House COVID-19 Response Team. But getting the drugs into the hands of those who are most vulnerable is critical. “Historically, we’ve always seen underutilization of the treatments for our older populations. And this is why older individuals are often the most vulnerable groups,” he points out. “Our older Americans are, once again, bearing the highest burden of severe outcomes from COVID-19, including higher rates of hospitalization and, unfortunately, death,” Tsai says. Reach out to your doctor about antivirals if you suspect COVID-19.

Is it really possible to get sick with the COVID-19 and the flu simultaneously?

The danger of the ongoing flu season has the CDC on high alert, and this year its recommending that adults aged 65-plus get the higher-dose or adjuvanted flu vaccines rather than the standard dose. The past two flu seasons have been milder than usual, with low numbers of cases and few hospitalizations and deaths. Experts attribute the decline to COVID-19 precautions such as wearing face masks and social distancing. People were

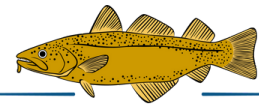
also traveling less during the height of the pandemic.

“Now that people are out and about without masks, traveling extensively, and once again having vacations, going to restaurants and religious services, and back to school and to the office, there are more opportunities for the [flu] virus to circulate,” says William Schaffner, medical director of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and a professor of infectious diseases at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee.

But there is a way to blunt influenza’s expected burden, and that’s with a flu shot. And even though we’re already in February, it’s not too late! The vaccine is especially critical for older adults, who see a natural decline in immune function with age and are at higher risk of developing complications from the flu. Older adults are also at higher risk of COVID-19 complications.

If COVID-19 really hit me hard, does that mean I’ll be hit hard by the flu too?

Not necessarily. “Our immune systems are as unique as fingerprints,” Lawrence says. Overall, in the absence of another medical condition (lung disease, for example) that leaves you vulnerable to respiratory infections, your response to COVID doesn’t predict how you’ll handle the flu — and vice versa, he says.



CAPE COD'S EVOLVING WASTEWATER CRISIS: FACING REALITY AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

*By Brian Baumgaertel, Director of the Massachusetts Alternative Technology Center
and Alexie Rudman, Responsible Management Entity (RME) Coordinator*

Cape Cod, our beautiful, glacially formed sandy paradise, is a special place. People love living here and visitors are abundant. According to the 2020 census, we have a year-round population of roughly 214,000 people; a number that essentially doubles in the summer season with part-time seasonal residents. Tourism, one of our key industries, brings in over \$1 billion annually, which gives an idea of Cape Cod's appeal as a vacation destination. With over 560 miles of scenic shoreline which includes arguably some of the best beaches in the world, stunning kettle ponds, quaint New England seaside towns, the National Seashore, and more—Cape Cod is nothing short of an ecological and recreational treasure. But all that appeal comes with a price and unfortunately, the environment is struggling to pay it.

Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today". When it comes to wastewater, humans are professional evaders. We flush, drain, spray, or dump it straight into the ground where we can't smell it, see it, or think about it. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Sadly enough for Cape Cod, this is not the case. In fact, the legacy septic systems and cesspools that nearly 85% of us have relied on for decades to 'treat' our waste are inflicting a wastewater crisis so dire it threatens the very nature of what makes Cape Cod a special place to live and visit. Ponds closed due to harmful algae blooms, thick muck at the bottom of the bays

where lush seagrass beds once thrived, declining shellfish harvests—these are all ways we experience the impacts of the pollution that comes from our insufficiently-treated waste. Our drinking water, our tourism-reliant economy, our fisheries, our ability to safely recreate, and our property values are all at stake.

As individuals, we can hardly be blamed for having to "do our business". As a community, we have been struggling (and some would say failing) to answer a myriad of questions in attempting to repair the damage: how do we fix this? How much will it cost? Who should pay? Over the past few decades, the answers to these questions have been—and continue to be—hotly debated in many public forums. Meanwhile, the damage has continued to compound itself. Cape Cod now finds itself at a crossroads.

Driven in part by a lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has developed a two-part package of regulatory changes that seek to propel town governments to act swiftly and decisively to remedy the problem. The first part leverages DEP's extensive authority to set an aggressive timeline for homeowners in ecologically sensitive areas to upgrade their standard "Title 5" septic systems with innovative/alternative nitrogen-reducing technology. The second part encourages towns

WASTEWATER

(Continued)

to take advantage of an under-utilized voluntary permitting process to forestall these financially burdensome changes to the septic system regulations. This measure would allow decision makers to apply a toolbox of different technologies and approaches to remediate nitrogen over a longer time frame. It's important to note that the regulatory changes would expand the definition of Nitrogen Sensitive Areas to estuaries, thereby increasing the number of homeowners impacted.

Regardless of what happens on the regulatory front, Barnstable County has been working diligently to develop and implement a set of programs aimed at providing assistance to towns and homeowners across a broad range of key areas. Some of our activities involve re-tooling existing programs, while others involve creating entirely new programs. Each of the programs falls into one of three buckets: technology research and development, infrastructure finance, and infrastructure management.

Technology and Research Development

Barnstable County's Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Technology Center (MASSTC) is engaged in many projects aimed at pushing the envelope when it comes to onsite septic systems. Companies from across the globe come to MASSTC to develop and test their technologies in the interest of meeting environmental and public health goals. New proprietary and non-proprietary



technologies developed at MASSTC are showing significantly improved nitrogen removal capability, with some able to reduce household wastewater nitrogen by up to 95 percent or more.

Staff at MASSTC are also looking at the removal of other contaminants of emerging concern, including phosphorus, pathogens, pharmaceuticals, PFOS, and others. We collaborate closely with a wide range of organizations, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Massachusetts DEP, The Nature Conservancy, Buzzards Bay Coalition, Barnstable Clean Water Coalition, University of Massachusetts, University of Rhode Island, Stony Brook University, National Sanitation Foundation, and more.

Technology and Research Development

Like many communities across the U.S., Cape Cod is home to individuals and families struggling with various economic challenges, including inflation and an ever-increasing cost of living. Imposing the

WASTEWATER

(Continued)

additional cost of addressing our collective nitrogen pollution problem on top of their already strained budgets will result in the continued exodus of low- to middle- income families. Cape Cod Aquifund, for example, is a County program we've designed to support Cape Cod residents by providing low- to no-interest betterment loans that homeowners can rely on to stretch the cost of wastewater treatment over up to 20 years. The program will be ready for launch in March of 2023.



Additional efforts are underway to secure funding that will provide additional financial assistance to low-to-moderate income families through subsidies such as grants and loan forgiveness.

Infrastructure Management

Technology development and finance only get us halfway to addressing our water quality crisis. Management and oversight play a key role in ensuring that the technologies and infrastructure we rely on to address water pollution on Cape Cod are working to meet our goals. A pilot program, funded by the U.S. EPA and the Nature Conservancy, is being developed and facilitated

by MASSTC to care for upgraded systems and oversee every aspect of their life cycle, from technology development and deployment to long-term monitoring and maintenance. The program, known as a Responsible Management Entity or RME, functions like a small utility and absorbs responsibility from the homeowner in ensuring that environmental goals are being met. Further, the RME provides expertise and management to support municipalities in fulfilling town-wide nitrogen reduction needs and requirements.

To preserve the beauty and uniqueness of Cape Cod's fragile ecosystem, we must act urgently. Hundreds of individuals and organizations at the local, county, and state level are working to develop and deploy solutions that meet their communities' needs every day. While many questions remain, and while there are many and sometimes conflicting ideas and opinions of how to address our wastewater problem, we must stay focused on our common goal of cleaning Cape Cod's waters: because our environment and economy depend on it.





RABIES: WHERE CAPE COD WILDLIFE AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEET

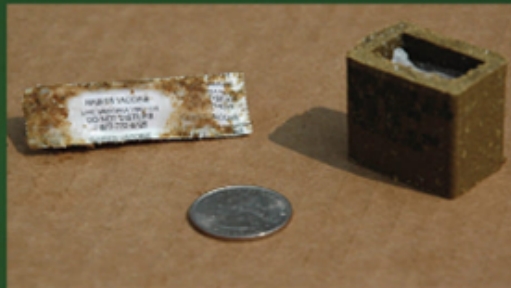
Erika Woods, Deputy Director



Helicopter



Bait Station



Coated Sachet (L) & Fishmeal Polymer Block (R)
Oral Rabies Vaccine Baits



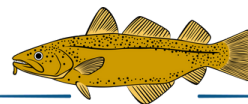
Vehicle

Cape Cod is home to over 450 species of wildlife that can be seen along our sandy shoreline, in our scenic conservation areas, and even in our own back yards. These animals are an important part of our fragile ecosystem, and we need to learn to safely coexist. While many of us are taught at a young age to stay away from wild animals, they are becoming more familiar with humans and interactions are increasingly common. In fact, each year there are more wildlife-human or wildlife-pet encounters that are reported, some of which involve direct contact including bites and scratches. These injuries carry not only the risk of infection but may also transmit disease. For this reason, it is important to know how to keep ourselves, our children, and our pets safe during wildlife interactions.

The best way to stay safe is to avoid contact with wildlife altogether. While walking around wooded areas, including your yard, keep an eye out for animals such as fox, coyotes, skunks, and

raccoons. These animals are nocturnal but will still come out during the day to find food especially during breeding season. If you notice a sick acting animal, it is best to stay far away and notify animal control.

To protect the Cape from raccoon or terrestrial rabies, the Cape Cod and Southeast Massachusetts Rabies Task Force (CCSMRTF) and the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program bi-annually distributes Oral Rabies Vaccine (ORV) on peninsular Cape Cod, along the canal, and in regions near Plymouth, Wareham, Kingston, Carver, Middleboro, Rochester, and Marion. These vaccines come in two forms: a bait block made of a fishmeal polymer with a small packet inside, or a sachet similar to a small ketchup packet that has a fishmeal coating to attract wild animals. Beginning in 2022, most ORV distribution was conducted using the coated sachets that are distributed into wooded areas via helicopter, but other strategies include bait stations and vehicle



RABIES AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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distribution, generally using bait blocks. The vaccines are not harmful to wildlife, pets or to humans but if you are concerned about your pet coming in contact with a vaccine/bait, please call your local health department or the ORV coordinator at 508-476-2956.

It is important to note that although terrestrial rabies is very uncommon on Cape Cod, bats can carry the rabies virus. Bats will move around to find tight, warm spaces; they'll inhabit your attic or basement when the weather is too hot or too cold. If you find a bat in your home, it is important to figure out if a person or pet has been in direct contact with the bat. If the bat was found in a room with an unattended child, or someone who was sleeping, it is best to assume that contact may have happened. In this case, it is important to safely capture the bat and contact your local health department to have the bat tested.



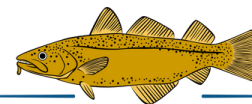
For more information about Rabies and that monitoring and baiting programs actively protecting our communities, please visit:

[Rabies](#) | [Mass.gov](#)

[Rabies](#) | [CDC](#)

[Rabies Awareness](#) | [Barnstable County \(capecod.gov\)](#)





METABOLIC SYNDROME: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR BODY AND YOUR BLOOD WORK

From CardioSmart, American College of Cardiology

What is METABOLIC SYNDROME?

► It is a **CLUSTER OF RISK FACTORS**
that can increase your risk of having:



HEART
ATTACK



STROKE



TYPE 2
DIABETES

Metabolic syndrome describes a group of risk factors for heart disease. These include:

Obesity: Waist circumference is an indicator at 40+ inches for men, and 35+ inches for women.

High Triglycerides (a type of fat/lipid in the blood): Greater than or equal to 150 mg/dL.

Low HDL or "good cholesterol": Less than 40mg/L for men and 50 mg/L for women.

High blood pressure: Greater than or equal to 130 mmHG/85 mmHG.

High fasting blood glucose: Greater than or equal to 100 mg/dL.

Who is affected by metabolic syndrome?

Metabolic syndrome affects 1 of every 3 adults in the United States.

85% of people with diabetes have metabolic syndrome.

Metabolic syndrome is closely linked to obesity.

Metabolic syndrome becomes more common as we age; nearly half of adults 60+ years old have it.

Metabolic syndrome is best prevented and even reversed by:

- **Losing weight**
- **Committing to regular exercise**
- **Eating better**
 - Eat fewer simple carbohydrates
 - Increase fiber
 - Consume healthy fats

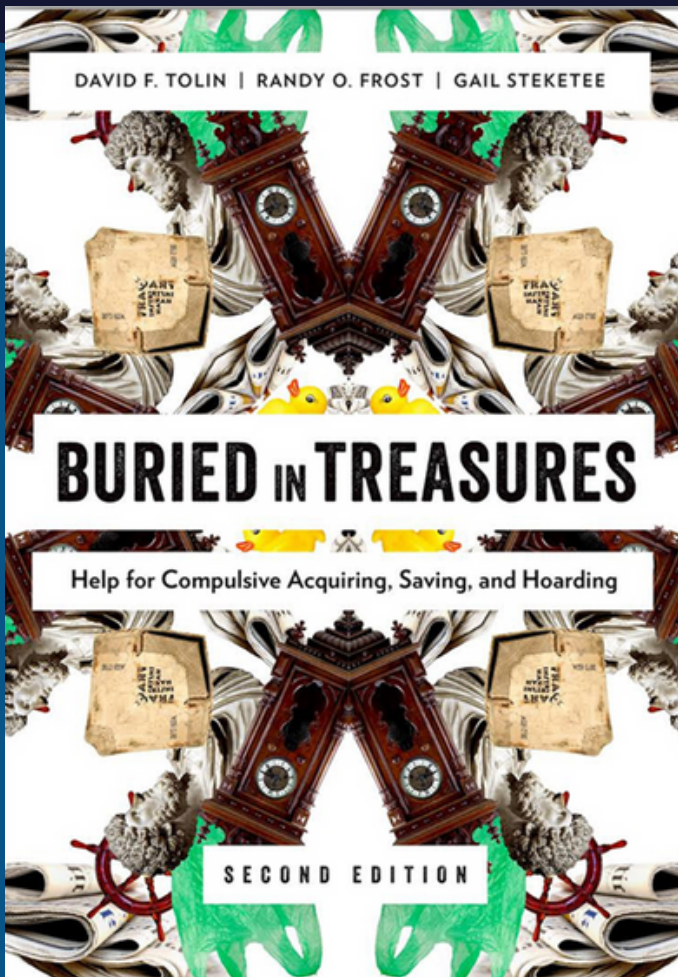


BARNSTABLE COUNTY EVENTS, RESOURCES, JOB OPPORTUNITIES, AND MORE

FREE Hoarding Workshop

16 Sessions, Starting February 1st
Tuesdays, 2:30PM - 4:30PM
Harwich Community Center
100 Oak St, Harwich, MA 02645

Registration required;
space is limited! Call us
at (508) 430-7568 to
reserve your spot!

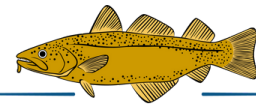


Join us for this multi-week hoarding workshop, based on the book *Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding*, by David Tolin, Randy Frost, and Gail Steketee.

All who attend will:

- Receive support from other attendees
- Receive a copy of *Buried in Treasures*
- Develop strategies to de-clutter your home
- Learn how to change problematic behaviors.

This event is co-sponsored by the Harwich Community Center and the Barnstable County Cape Cod Hoarding Task Force.



Looking for a meaningful way to spend your summer, gain valuable experience, network, and serve your community?

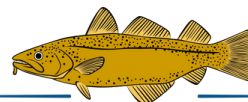
Come work with us at the Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment in one of our seasonal/temporary positions!



Positions are posted at www.capecod.gov in mid-February. Positions are full-time/seasonal, in-person, non-flex, and run between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Benefits are not offered for these temporary positions. Mileage reimbursement included for on-the-job travel within Barnstable County. Two paid holidays.



**Visit Barnstable County
Employment Opportunities**



BARNSTABLE COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Colleague
Corner

Did you know?

Our colleagues at the Barnstable County Department of Human Services work hard for YOU to provide a diverse range of programs and services pertaining to:

- [Aging Well & Healthy Living](#)
- [Behavioral Health](#)
- [Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [SHINE \(Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone\)](#)
- [Substance Use Prevention](#)



Click the image to sign up for the Human Services e-newsletter!

"The mission of the Barnstable County Department of Human Services is to plan, develop, and implement programs which enhance the overall delivery of human services in Barnstable County, to promote the health and social well-being of County residents through regional efforts designed to improve coordination and efficiency of human services, and designed to strengthen the fabric of community care available to all."

WHERE TO FIND US



Barnstable County Complex
3195 Main Street | Barnstable, Massachusetts 02630
Buildings & Departments





- 1 Cape Cod Commission
- 2 Superior Courthouse, Finance, Commissioners Office, Assembly of Delegates - Clerk, County Clerk
- 3 Registry of Deeds, Cape Cod Cooperative Extension
- 4 Old Sheriff's House, AmeriCorps Cape Cod
- 5 Human Services, Water Quality Lab
- 6 Health & Environment
- 7 Information Technology
- 8 First District Courthouse

A CCC Conference Room

B Barnstable County Commissioners Conference Room

C RDO Conference Room

D Harbor View Conference Room

E Mary Pat Flynn Conference Room

F Innovation Room

Assembly of Delegates Regular Meetings

Board of Regional Commissioners Regular Meetings

COMMUNITY
HEALTH

NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION



BARNSTABLE COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

BARNSTABLE COUNTY'S PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING TEAM

Wendy Judd BSN, RN

Public Health Nurse

wendy.judd@capecod.gov

(774) 223-7175

Debra Jones

Administrator

debra.jones@capecod.gov

Telephone: 508-375-6837

Theresa Covell BSN, RN

Assistant Public Health Nurse

theresa.covell@capecod.gov

(774) 314-2514

Barbara Blackwell CNS, PT

barbara.blackwell@capecod.gov

(508) 470-4545

Patrice Barrett

patrice.barrett@capecod.gov

(508) 443-6297

Maurice Melchiono MS, RN

Assistant Public Health Nurse

maurice.melchiono@capecod.gov

(508) 237-7354

Lisa DuBrow

lisa.dubrow@capecod.gov

(774) 262-3495

GENERAL CONTACT INFORMATION

bch.info@capecod.gov

(508) 375-6613

We want to hear from you!

Click the button below to answer a few questions to help us better understand what our readers would like to see in future editions. We value your input!



Send us your feedback!