



# Wood County Health Department

*100 years protecting public health*

## Highlights in Public Health 1920-2020

This timeline was assembled as part of the celebration of the health department's 100 year anniversary to showcase accomplishments and milestones in public health in Wood County and the United States. It was put together using previously written history documents, newspaper clippings, historic documents, personal interviews and internet searches.

- 1917 Ohio began experiencing an epidemic of smallpox, which was partly credited toward people who were opposed to vaccinations for the disease. Across Ohio from 1917-1918, more than 11,000 cases of smallpox were reported, including 14 deaths. The state's response efforts were estimated to have cost at least \$1 million.
- 1918 An outbreak of Spanish influenza spread from Europe to the United States. Businesses and schools closed during the height of the pandemic, which was estimated to have killed 50 million people worldwide, including 670,000 Americans.
- 1919 The Ohio Legislature passed the Hughes-Griswold Act, which established municipal and general health districts across the state of Ohio to ensure that the state could effectively respond to public health crises. Although all municipalities in Ohio were required to form a Board of Health in 1893, it became clear following smallpox and influenza epidemics that a more comprehensive and formalized approach to public health was necessary. Each health district was required to have a full-time health commissioner, at least one full-time public health nurse, and at least one full-time clerk.
- 1920 The first District Advisory Council meeting was held on Jan. 20, 1920. The council determined that the townships of Wood County and the city of Bowling Green would cooperate and function as one health district. This was an informal agreement; no contract was signed, and the county and city each retained independent control of its own budget. A total budget of \$4,650 was established for the health district, \$1,000 of which was provided by the state. The Board of Health consisted of five members: George T. Brim of Plain Township; Dr. R. Frederick Whitacre of Prairie Depot (president);

Dr. J. Cliff Wetherill of Weston (vice president); Robert L. Ennis of Rossford; and James H. Apple of Henry Township.

The board appointed as health commissioner Dr. Harley J. Powell. Early resolutions sought to control infectious diseases by allowing people who were ill to be excluded from schools, theaters, moving picture shows, billiard halls and all other places of amusement, as well as churches, Sunday schools and all public gatherings. Pupils were required to obtain a certificate from the Health Commissioner before they could return to school after an illness. Additional regulations allowed the inspection of schools, slaughterhouses, dairies, bakeries, restaurants, meat and milk producers, green grocers and ice suppliers. Nuisances like manure removal, unsuitable housing and disposal of sewage, soap suds, liquid manure and hogs were also addressed.

- 1921 There were 506 reported cases of contagious diseases. Diphtheria accounted for over 20% of the cases and five deaths. Three patients had not received the diphtheria antitoxin, one person received it too late, and one died because "The mother knew more than the doctor." Dr. Powell and Ms. Crawford, RN, examined 6,720 pupils that year.
- 1922 A rabid dog in Rossford bit eight people. The commissioner ordered that all of the dogs in the city be quarantined and all strays picked up. The eight victims received Pasteur treatment at the expense of the health department.
- 1923 Board of Health minutes recorded that "very unscrupulous persons were peddling meats in the streets of some of the villages without much attention to sanitary conditions." Resolution # 7 required an application and permit inspections of the operations of people peddling meat on the streets and byways. It also regulated slaughter and sale of meat and permitted home slaughter and limited sale to neighbors.
- 1925 A member of the farm bureau presented information about a bovine tuberculosis eradication program and a program for compensating farmers for losses when their animals tested positive for exposure to tuberculosis.
- 1927 The department's budget included money to help people who could not afford the cost of minor surgery or eye glasses.
- 1930s The first regulations governing production, processing, distribution and labeling of milk were passed. Wood County Health Department regulated the county milk supply into the 1950s, when a uniform pasteurization law took effect.
- 1934 A resolution was passed to officially combine the health district of Bowling Green with the Wood County Health Department. An annual contract had to be accepted by both parties. Initially, services included communicable disease control, sanitary control of streets and alleys, and water, sewage, plumbing and milk programs.
- 1934 A regulation required landlords to remove outside toilet facilities and clean up the remaining sewage in areas within 30 feet of wells that provided drinking water for nearby residences.

- 1936 At the height of the Great Depression, the U.S. Public Health Service doubled Wood County Health Department's budget through a matching funds program. The total budget was approximately \$24,720.
- 1937 The first fee schedule and set of inspection regulations for food service operations were established by the Wood County Board of Health.
- 1940s Libby Owens Ford requested an X-ray screening program, as a result, 4,500 people being screened for TB. This was the first indication of an occupational or worksite health program in board minutes.
- 1941 Patch tests and X-ray follow up were used in tuberculosis screening. One case of advanced TB was found in one of the schools; unfortunately, the parents refused to allow treatment. The Health Department tried to exclude the child from school, but the local courts indicated that they did not have that authority, ruling that only the school board could exclude children from school. People with TB were sent to sanitariums on a voluntary basis or through commitments. Noncompliant people were considered to be a menace to the public. Board of Health minutes describe several instances where clients failed to stay in the sanitariums.
- 1942 During World War II, munitions plants and store houses were established in Perrysburg Township and Troy Township. These plants generated the need for additional food service operations in those areas.
- 1942 The health commissioner reported four cases of diphtheria among migrant laborers in the prior year; the Board of Health responded by supporting a program to immunize children in the migrant communities.
- 1946 Mass X-ray screening of school children found 13 suspicious cases of tuberculosis and 17 children with cardiac defects, tumors and other health problems.
- 1948 The commissioner and the department were encouraged to place more emphasis on public relations with the newspapers, schools, doctors and town officials. Other items of interest included concerns about sanitation at the Bowling Green swimming pool and early complaints about dumps. Milk quality remained one of the most pressing public health issues. Sanitarians occasionally had to impose restrictions on importing milk into the county from outside producers.
- 1949 Wood County's sanitarians had the ambitious goal to inspect restaurants four to six times a year. Restaurant fees were based on number of seats in a restaurant and ranged from \$3 to \$15. A new school health program was developed to bring tuberculosis under "better control." The Health Department and the Wood County Tuberculosis Association made arrangements to X-ray all freshmen at BGSU, Bowling Green High School, and employees of the Quaker Maid Canning Company in Bloomdale. In all, 2,065 BGSU students, 603 high school students and 257 Quaker Maid employees had been screened for TB. Nurses were spending 41% of their time on TB; there were 20 active cases, 18 arrested cases, and 11 apparently cured cases on their registry.
- 1950s Issues included a problem with people in Tontogany who were "carrying water from a contaminated well", sanitary conditions at some of the schools, outdoor toilets, garbage

and rats, a new restaurant law, trailer camps, sewage installations, water sampling, trichinosis from bologna made at a local slaughterhouse, milk plants, swimming pools and rest homes. There were still privies overflowing in Rossford and Bowling Green. Nursing issues of the early '50s included an outbreak of acute infectious hepatitis, a change in quarantine procedures for scarlet fever, and hearing and vision tests for children.

- 1957 Sanitarians were maintaining programs in food service, private sewage disposal, school inspections, nuisance complaints, dairy inspections and private well water testing. Forty percent of water samples were deemed unsafe.
- 1958 Discussion was held regarding the need to consider sanitary sewers and a treatment plant for Perrysburg, the cost of which was to be paid by property owners.
- 1959 The state of Ohio began requiring certain immunizations to attend school.
- 1960 Wood County Health Department moved from a house at 216 E. Court St. to the location at 541 W. Wooster St. (the first floor of the children's home).
- 1960s Perrysburg's population reached 5,519 and it chose to participate in what was officially known as the Wood County Combined General Health District, naming one representative to the Board of Health.
- 1962 The District Advisory Council discussed faulty sewer systems. Some council members felt that garbage disposals were responsible for the failure of some systems. The health commissioner reported that the Board of Health "feels they are going in the right direction with aeration systems."
- 1963 At the District Advisory Council meeting, members suggested that health education efforts should focus on smallpox vaccination, venereal disease education in the high school, and eliminating tuberculosis. The Board of Health directed that a new sanitarian should search for individual homes discharging raw sewage into streams and ditches and correct them immediately.
- 1964 As a result of changing practices for treatment of mental illness and court cases prohibiting involuntary incarceration, public health nurses found themselves trying to follow recently released patients. They felt that they needed more training and knew they could not serve many patients. The Board agreed that the nurses could assume this role as long as it did not require more staff.
- 1971 Rossford officially became a city and appointed a member to the Board of Health.
- 1973 An occupational health program was in place, focusing on safety and health promotion in the workplace. The Nursing Division had contracts with five industrial plants. Public health nurses visited 50 of the approximately 130 industries in Wood County.
- 1974 The Women, Infants and Children program began in Wood County, providing supplemental food to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

- 1977 The first nutritionist was hired to provide individual counseling and help people realize the importance of sound nutritional practices.
- 1979 The Board of Health approved a no-smoking policy for its meetings.
- 1980 Northwood's population reaches 5,000 and joins the Wood County Combined General Health District, naming one representative to the Board of Health.
- 1985 There was an epidemic of Norwalk-like viral gastroenteritis at BGSU. The incident received national coverage including USA Today.
- 1991 A 10-year, 0.5 mill health services levy was approved by voters, providing a stable base of funding that allowed the health department to restore staffing and add and expand programming. This included prenatal and primary health care for uninsured and under-insured adults and children; HIV/AIDS education; WIC; and enhanced inspection of food service operations, schools, pools, water and septic systems.
- 1991 Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a bloodborne pathogens standard to protect workers from occupational exposure to hepatitis B and HIV. In response, the health department hired a public health nurse to provide training to schools, EMS squads, county agencies and others.
- 1992 The Board of Health established a Community Health Advisory Committee (CHAC) with instructions to complete a Community Assessment and Planning process, the first of its kind in Ohio. The CHAC identified and prioritized 17 problem areas.
- 1992 The National Association of Local Boards of Health is founded by Ned Baker, who started a long public health career as a sanitarian with Wood County in the 1950s. Baker served as the first president of NALBO and was later a member of the Board of Health.
- 1995 The Health Department moved from 541 West Wooster St. to 1840 East Gypsy Lane Road in February. The Department had outgrown the facilities on West Wooster, and the building, owned by the Wood County Commissioners, was showing its nearly 100 years of use.
- 1995 The Board of Health approved new regulations for tattoo establishments.
- 1995 The Centers for Disease Control reports that lead poisoning is the top public health problem for children under the age of 6.
- 1995 A wastewater dye mishap in Fostoria caused the Portage River to turn fluorescent green. "It was solid from bank to bank," the West Millgrove fire chief said. Officials said there were no health or environmental concerns.
- 1996 HIV prevention curriculum and videos were developed and distributed to all Wood County schools.
- July 1996 Adult primary care services began at the health department to serve uninsured and underinsured Wood County residents. A total of 187 people participated in the program that year.

- 2000 Measles was declared eliminated from the United States. Effective vaccination programs and control measures were highly responsible for the diseases elimination.
- 2001 The first meeting of the Wood County Child Fatality Review Board took place to discuss the causes of deaths for children and what measures can be taken to prevent future deaths.
- 2001 Terrorists attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Anthrax found in mail on the East Coast leads to an increase in the number of suspicious letters reported to law enforcement across the country. Locally, emergency responders and some health department staff responded to numerous reports of suspicious letters, none of which tested positive for anthrax.
- 2001 Bowling Green approved the Clean Indoor Air Act, requiring public places and places of employment to be smoke free.
- 2002 Federal funding to improve public health preparedness is made available. In Ohio, much of this funding is passed down to local health departments allowing them to hire and train staff and make plans to be better prepared for emergencies such as Anthrax outbreaks and pandemics.
- 2003 WCHD vaccinates some employees and other responders for smallpox, which was eradicated in 1979 but became a bioterrorism concern.
- 2004 The health department investigates multiple cases of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) in athletes, providing recommendations and oversight to contain the outbreak and prevent other infections.
- 2006 Vaccine approved for human papillomavirus (HPV), the main cause of cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine along with cervical cancer screening have made it one of the most preventable cancers.
- 2006 The Ohio Disease Reporting System was created to allow electronic tracking of infectious diseases.
- April 2009 The first H1N1flu case is reported in Wood County. Wood County Health Department held 18 vaccination clinics between October 2009 and January 2010 and gave thousands of vaccines.
- June 2010 Lake Township is hit by a tornado that killed 7 people and destroyed homes and Lake High School. Health department employees helped with the response and administered tetanus vaccines to volunteers who were helping with debris clean-up.
- 2010 The Affordable Care Act takes effect, giving many people new access to health care.
- April 2012 Wood County Community Health Center receives Federally Qualified Health Center Look Alike status and begins receiving increased Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement rates, significantly improving long-term financial stability.

- Nov. 2013 The health department received status as a Federally Qualified Health Center by the federal government. This designation provided funds to increase services to underserved populations in the area.
- 2014 World Health Organization warns that the antibiotic resistance crisis is becoming dire.
- 2014 Microcystis toxin was found in the Toledo Metropolitan water supply. The 3-day ban on drinking or using tap water affected over 400,000 people in northwest Ohio, including many in northern Wood County.
- Oct. 2014 A nurse who had cared for a now-deceased Ebola patient in Dallas, had flown into Cleveland visiting family in the Akron area. A day after returning to Dallas, she was diagnosed with Ebola. One of the most immediate concerns was identifying the 130 other passengers on her return flight.
- 2015 A major milestone in beating HIV/AIDS is reached when a medication is released that taken as a single pill once a day can successfully prevent infection in most cases.
- May 2015 The Community Health Center began offering on-site pharmacy services for patients, making the center a “one-stop shop” for patients on medication. In addition to the convenience, the pharmacy is able to purchase medications at a reduced rate and passes this savings onto the patient, making many medications more affordable.
- 2016 After four years of work, Wood County Health Department received approval by the Public Health Accreditation Board and became an accredited public health agency.
- 2016 The health department begins training and distributing Naloxone to local law enforcement.
- 2016 The health department receives Water Pollution Control Loan Fund from the Ohio EPA for the first time. These funds have helped many Wood County residents with their home sewage system improvements.
- 2017 The health department was designated by the Ohio Department of Health as the Regional Public Health Coordinator and began service as an emergency preparedness and response resource for all 18 counties in Northwest Ohio. In addition to emergency preparedness, the department is available to help with epidemiology and public information advice and coordination.
- 2017 The Community Health Center began integrating behavioral health services into primary care visits, offering screening and brief counseling services as a normal part of a medical visit.
- July 2017 The Community Health Center was designated as a Patient Centered Medical Home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance. This status certifies that the health center’s services focus on the patient using a team approach.
- Oct. 2017 The US Government declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency. More than 130 people died every day from opioid-related drug overdoses in 2016 and 2017, according to the US Department of Health & Human Services.

- 2018 CDC reports 80,000 people died from influenza, making it the worst flu season since 1976.
- 2018 In April, Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams issued a national advisory urging a significant portion of the public to carry opioid overdose antidotes that contain the drug naloxone.
- 2018 In September, the FDA’s commissioner said e-cigarettes are an “epidemic” among teens. Nearly 40% of teens admit to vaping.
- 2018 CDC investigated more than 2 dozen multistate foodborne illness outbreaks.
- 2019 Dental services begin in the Community Health Center, making dental care more available to people who don’t have insurance or receive Medicaid.
- 2019 U.S. sees the largest measles outbreak since it was declared eliminated in 2000. There were more than 1,200 cases across 30 states despite availability and recommendations for vaccination due to vaccine hesitancy among some parents.
- 2019 Vaping related illnesses climb and the first death is reported in August. By the end of the year, there were more than 2,500 hospitalizations and 54 deaths.

This was a highlight of public health milestones in the last 100 years.

Thank you to Wood County Board of Health members and Wood County Health Department employees past and present for their contributions.

Wood County Health Department is committed to continuing its mission to prevent disease, promote healthy lifestyles and protect the health of everyone in Wood County for the next 100 years and beyond.



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