



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner

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[nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)

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Dear Colleague:

Welcome to the New York City medical community! You are now a very important part of the health care and public health system in New York City. To assist you in your new role, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) provides important bulletins about reportable diseases and conditions, common health concerns, and ways to contact the Department for more information.

Enclosed are some materials for your use, including recent issues of *City Health Information (CHI)*, the DOHMH's bulletin for physicians in New York City; these are also available on our agency's website, [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health). The Department offers information for both health care providers and the public on a wide variety of health topics, much of which is available on our website.

Certain diseases and conditions must by law be reported to the DOHMH. Confidentiality of reports to the Department is strictly protected by local, state, and federal law; the federal Health Care Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy regulations specifically authorize disclosure when required by law. The enclosed material provides a list of these reportable diseases and conditions, and is also posted on our website. While laboratories are also mandated to report, only clinicians can provide the clinical and demographic information needed for disease control and prevention. This information helps the Department work with the medical community to prevent and control outbreaks, detect emerging disease threats, and improve patient care.

As New York City continues to face new and emerging public health challenges, we at DOHMH know that our partnership with the medical community remains essential. It was, after all, the prompt reporting to the Department of an atypical cluster of encephalitis cases by an infectious disease physician in the summer of 1999 that triggered the identification of an arboviral outbreak and the public health response to what was later found to be West Nile Virus.

Many in the medical community turned to us during the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath for up-to-date information on anthrax, air quality, and other challenging problems. The Department has worked closely with the City's acute care hospitals in the past year to implement smallpox preparedness plans. The merger of the former Departments of Health and of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Alcoholism Services, which occurred in July 2002, has resulted in greatly improved interaction between the health and mental hygiene patient and provider communities in the City, giving all of us the opportunity to better coordinate total patient care.

In many respects, the health status of New Yorkers has never been better. We have recently recorded historical bests on significant health indicators such as life expectancy and the infant mortality rate. However, there are still great disparities in the health status of our many neighborhoods and communities, and one of our primary goals is directing resources to the areas where they are most needed.

By far, the largest single cause of premature death is smoking. Tobacco kills 10,000 New Yorkers each year – about one every hour. Second-hand smoke also kills, leading to 1,000 deaths and 40,000 more illnesses in the City every year. (More information is available on our website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/smoke/smokeb.html>.) As a member of the medical profession, you are on the front lines of our smoking prevention and cessation efforts. Your patients depend on you for medical care and advice, and you can have a tremendous impact in helping those who smoke to quit. Tobacco use (current, former, never) should be addressed at every visit with every patient, and every smoker should be provided with a clear and personalized cessation message at each visit. (See *City Health Information: Treating Nicotine Addiction*, which is available online at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/chi/chi21-6.pdf>.)

Obesity and resultant diabetes have become an epidemic, with the prevalence of diabetes more than doubling in New York City in just the past 8 years. (See *Vital Signs: Diabetes Is Epidemic*, available on our website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/survey/survey-2002diabetes.pdf>, for more information.) Providing specific counsel to your patients who are overweight regarding ways they can increase their level of physical activity and improve the quality of their diet will be extremely important in combating this potentially disabling condition. Persons with diabetes who have adequate control of their “ABC”s – **HbA**1c, **B**lood pressure, and **C**holesterol – can reduce their chance of stroke and heart attack by half.

More than 1,500 New Yorkers die of colon cancer each year; virtually all of these deaths could be prevented by appropriate screening. Colonoscopy is the preferred screening method for all persons age 50 or older; the procedure not only detects precancerous colon polyps, it removes them as well. (More information can be found in *City Health Information: Preventing Colorectal Cancer*, available on our website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/pdf/chi/chi22-2.pdf>.) The survival rate of colon cancer when detected early is greater than 90%, but far too many patients currently present with late-stage disease because they were never screened.

Every year, more than 2,000 New Yorkers die from complications from influenza and pneumonia. Many of these deaths can be easily prevented with annual flu shots. Current recommendations are that all persons age 50 and older receive annual flu shots, with the addition of a one-time pneumococcal vaccination for those age 65 and older. However, there is no reason not to give an annual flu shot to all of your patients unless there is a specific contraindication; although the risk of death is greatest for people age 65-plus, a flu shot can prevent debilitating illness in virtually all who receive it. Annual flu shots are recommended for children age 6 months or older with specific risk factors (e.g., asthma, HIV, diabetes) and encouraged for all children age 6 months to 2 years, but most children (like most adults) can benefit from being immunized.

We look forward to working with you to improve the health of your patients. You can obtain immediate consultations with Department physicians and other staff via our Provider Access Line (1-866-NYC-DOH1, or 1-866-692-3641) and with our Poison Control Center (212-POISONS, or 212-764-7667). Please visit us at [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health).

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner