



Epi-Center



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What's Happening in the District?

Tracking Invasive Group A Streptococcus (IGAS)

Despite being known for causing mild diseases in children such as strep throat and scarlet fever, group A streptococcus (GAS) can also cause more severe illness (ex: sepsis, toxic shock syndrome, necrotizing fasciitis, etc.) and become “invasive” once it enters sterile areas of the body such as the bloodstream. Starting from March this year, the EPI Department has been investigating an outbreak of IGAS in a Hall County long term care facility (LTCF). Multiple testing rounds have been administered by District 2 Public Health and LTCF staff to residents and fellow LTCF employees so far.

To prevent IGAS infection, it is important to limit the spread/exposure of bacteria and take antibiotics as instructed when given by your provider. Simple steps such as handwashing, covering your cough and sneezes, and proper wound care go a long way to avoid getting sick from IGAS. For more information, please visit the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) and the [Georgia Department of Public Health \(GA DPH\)](https://www.dph.ga.gov) webpages.



Respiratory Infections on the Rise

Since late spring of 2024, [Georgia has seen an increase of community-acquired pneumonia patients](#), especially in the pediatric setting, that are often identifying the bacteria *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* as the cause. While influenza-like illness (which includes RSV, flu, rhinovirus, and more) activity overall remains low in Georgia as of 11/08, it is expected to increase greatly as the weather gets colder.

Please remember to stay safe and do your part in preventing the spread of illness by practicing proper hand hygiene frequently and staying home when sick. For general guidance on respiratory illness, please visit the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov) website. Flu-specific information for Georgia can be found [here](#).

What About the Vaccine-Preventable Stuff?

Great question! The EPI Department has also seen increased reports of new chickenpox cases across District 2. [Chickenpox is a very contagious illness that is caused by the varicella zoster virus](#), manifesting as a fever and itchy rash that spreads from the torso and face across the rest of the body. The infection can also stay dormant and reactivate later in life to cause shingles, which can then spread by touch to infect others. Those who have never had chickenpox or received the vaccine are easily infected, so the best way to prevent the spread of varicella is to get vaccinated.

All county health departments in District 2 offer vaccine services, so drop on by! You may also see us annually at our drive-thru flu clinics. This year, we hosted these clinics from late September (09/19) to early November (11/05). Don't worry if you missed out this time; you can always reach out to your county's health department for vaccine appointment availability. For similar events, keep yourself updated by visiting our [website](#) and following us on Facebook/Instagram!

Notes From the CDS/STI Program

CDS Team Updates

The Communicable Disease Specialists (CDS) discussed expanding rapid testing for syphilis in clinics and using “Let’s Get Checked” home test kits to give preliminary results to those concerned about STD exposure. Anyone who receives a positive result should receive confirmatory testing, be it at one of District 2’s county health departments or at a private practice.

From 11/12 to 11/14, our CDS Team will be attending a training in Lagrange, GA with the Georgia STD State Office and Denver Prevention Training Center. Featured topics range from field safety, to interviewing specifics for STIs/HIV, to self-care and wellness.

Outreach Events

- 10/17/2024 – Young Harris University
- 10/29/2024 – Lanier Tech College Resource Fair
- 10/31/2024 – University of North Georgia, Gainesville
- 11/04/2024 – The Hope Center, Toccoa

Wished you could have gone to one of the events but missed your chance? Have no fear, there are more to come!

- 11/20/2024, 1 PM to 5 PM – Dawsonville Food Bank

Interested in a “Let’s Get Checked” Home Test Kit?

Scan the QR code to the right! Just fill out the form that pops up, and we’ll take care of the rest!



More Disease Reporting Updates

Two new changes have been made to disease reporting as of October, both of which are diseases/illnesses to be reported within 7 days:

- Spotted Fever Rickettsiosis (*Rickettsia* spp.) no longer requires clinical material submission to the Georgia Public Health Laboratory (GPHL).
- Congenital cytomegalovirus in infants ≤ 21 days of age should now be reported to GA DPH.

You may view the updated and complete notifiable disease reporting guidelines on the [GA DPH notifiable disease reporting](#) page.

<i>Immediate Reporting</i>	<i>Reporting Within 7 Days</i>
Phone: (770) 519-7661 Public Health Line: +1 (866) 782-4584	Email: DPHDistrict2epi@gets.onmicrosoft.com
Fax: (770) 535-5848	Online: State Electronic Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (SENDSS)



EPI Spotlight: Judy Rhodes

Judy Rhodes graduated from Piedmont College. Her DPH District 2 health career began in 2020. She is a supervisor for a team who works as a COVID School Liaison and works with chlamydia and gonorrhea STI cases. Judy states she is honored to work toward a healthier community with DPH, under great leadership from Dr. Taylor and Marie Brown. Judy says she loves her job, loves having an outstanding team to supervise and working with fellow DPH employees. Judy enjoys working with GCSS and HCSD by answering their health questions and appeasing their anxiety in cases of COVID. She is hopeful her work with STIs will help lessen the burden of STIs in our community. Judy says some of her favorite things to enjoy are family, friends, 2 senior dogs, walking and listening to audiobooks.

District 2 Public Health Serves the Following Counties: Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, & White