

Onondaga County Health Department Annual Report

2020

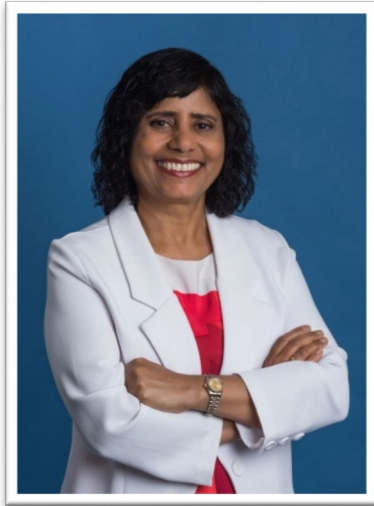
Pandemic Edition



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Message from the Commissioner of Health



Dear Community Members,

The year 2020 was an unprecedented moment in history, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed us in innumerable ways. This annual report will provide a brief overview of the essential services we as a department were able to provide to our community during this time when our resources were intensely focused on fighting the pandemic.

The year 2020 was a year that changed us in ways we could not have imagined: the loss of life, illness and isolation, the damage to the economy and our ability to make a living. As a department, we worked every day to meet these enormous challenges with our County leadership and skilled and prepared workforce. As a community, we have come together through our individual and collective responsibility to slow the spread and to encourage as many residents as possible to get vaccinated. The vaccine is safe, effective, free, and the best way to prevent illness and death and to regain a level of normalcy in our lives.

We hope this report provides you with a succinct summary of the Health Department's accomplishments during an unprecedented year. We always welcome your suggestions on how we can continue to improve the health of all residents of Onondaga County, and look forward to our continued collaborative work alongside our community partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Indu Gupta". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Indu Gupta, MD, MPH, MA, FACP
Commissioner
Onondaga County Health Department

Onondaga County Health Department

Mission

*To protect and improve the health
of all residents of Onondaga County.*

Vision

*A community of partners working together for the
physical, social, and emotional well-being of all.*

Values

Respect • Excellence • Accountability • Collaboration • Health Equity



Onondaga County Legislature 2020 Health Committee

Julie Abbott-Kenan, Chair
Peggy Chase, Vice Chair
Ken Bush
Deb Cody
Bill Kinne

2020 Health Advisory Board

David Page, MD, Chair
Louis Castro, MD
Robert Hack
Derrick Murry
Ann Rooney
Simone Seward
Monica Williams

Onondaga County Health Department 2020 Organizational Chart

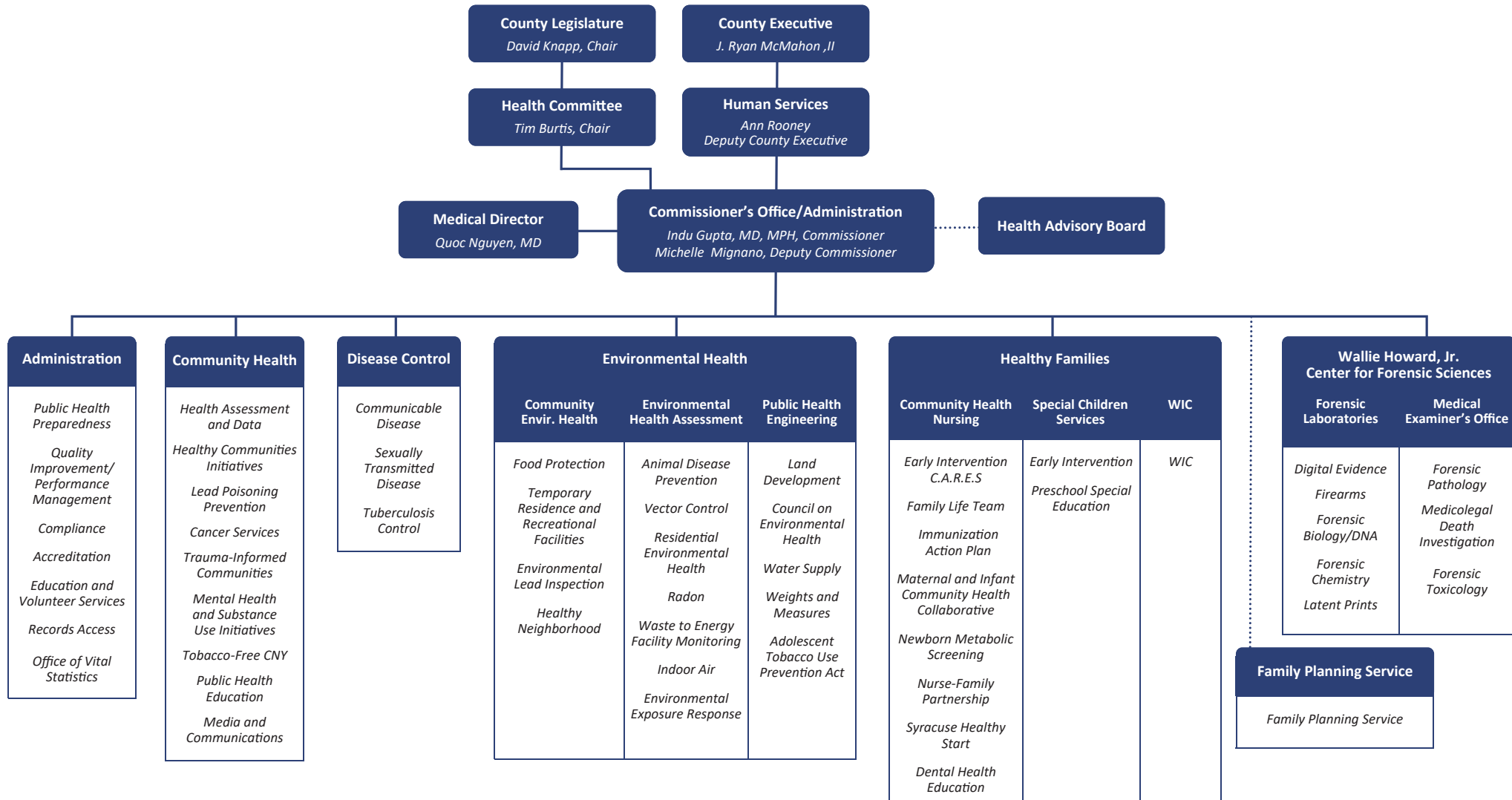


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Administration

For most of 2020, Onondaga County Health Department (OCHD) lived and breathed the impacts of COVID-19 and will continue in 2021. This segment will provide a summary of 2020 work.

Freshly accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board \(PHAB\)](#) on August 21, 2018, OCHD was well prepared to function as a full service local health department (LHD). We completed an “All Hazards Plan” as part of Public Health Preparedness (PHP) in 2017 and have continued to revise it annually since then. This plan provides guidance on how to utilize personnel and resources to manage and respond to any newly emerging public health crisis with special emphasis on novel infectious diseases. OCHD leadership continued to build connectivity with community stakeholders ranging from area hospitals, the medical society, community based organizations, corrections, homeless shelters, local colleges and universities, pharmacies, and Air National Guard base to name a few. One of the main action items in these collaborative relationships is to plan and drill managing Medical Countermeasures (MCM) and Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions. All such preparation resulted in our readiness to handle the nuances of infections caused by the novel coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2 resulting in COVID-19 disease.



Dr. Gupta speaks at the March 9, 2020 press briefing regarding preparations for the 2019 novel coronavirus.

The Commissioner, along with senior leadership, closely watched the unfolding of events in Wuhan China, and monitored new information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH). The Commissioner issued a provider alert on January 24, 2020 to medical practitioners in Onondaga County to amplify the NYSDOH and CDC messages about the 2019 novel coronavirus in China, the requirement to ask about travel history of symptomatic patients, and the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers (HCW) encountering these patients.

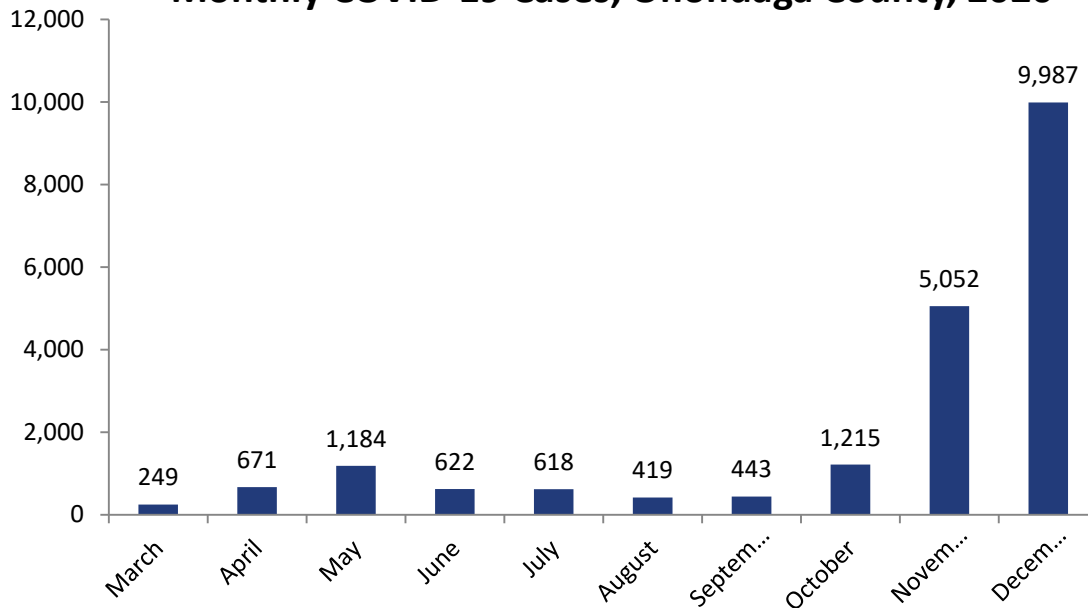
February to March 2020, when travelers returning to the US from China were

quarantined, OCHD’s Bureau of Disease Control and Public Health Preparedness staff managed and monitored their precautionary quarantine and provided necessities such as thermometers, masks, and food items.

Health Department administration provided the vision, direction, operational support, and medical and public health recommendations to the community. The Commissioner led the pandemic response with the support from the Deputy Commissioner, Medical Director, and senior leadership team of the health department 7 days a week from the beginning of the pandemic when the first case was diagnosed on March 16, 2020. OCHD set up and opened an Information Hotline for COVID-19 questions on April 3, 2020. As the number of daily cases increased rapidly from a 7 day average of around 20 to more than 40

new cases a day in early October 2020, with further increases after Halloween, investigation, tracing, and isolation/quarantine orders demanded a large commitment of OCHD medical and non-medical staff into this line of work. Data collection and extensive data analysis of daily hospitalizations, discharges, critical care status, deaths, and clusters were crucial in providing various policy recommendations to the County Executive. The Commissioner actively participated in daily press briefings with the County Executive to inform the public. All COVID-19 data were updated daily on OCHD’s [COVID-19 website](#) for public use.

Monthly COVID-19 Cases, Onondaga County, 2020



Source: Onondaga County Health Department

Onondaga County, 2020	
Confirmed Cases	20,460
Recovered	15,194
Deaths	452

**Deaths include hospital/community deaths, plus confirmed nursing home deaths tracked by NYSDOH.*

To address the resources needed in the community, the Public Health Preparedness (PHP) program staff, under the guidance of the Commissioner, activated the County Staging Site (CSS) to accept and distribute resources from State and Federal government to respond to the COVID pandemic locally. OCHD administration team also worked collaboratively with the Department of Emergency Management team to mitigate impact of COVID 19 in Onondaga County at every level.

Case numbers continued to surge in the county and across New York to an average of over 200 in November 2020 and reaching near peak of 454 cases on December 31, 2020, the worst months for cases in Onondaga County. Daily cases continued to increase into January 2021.

A strong foundation for case investigation and contact tracing was established with continued oversight and continuous improvement of the process. The entire health department staff from its various public health programs were involved in case investigation and contact tracing, and provided support to cases and contacts by delivering food and medicine, and linking them to medical care, social services, and mental health services as needs arose. This was a 7 day-a-week continuous operation. Many other county department staff also received training from OCHD staff to become case investigators and contact tracers and worked alongside OCHD staff to curb the impact of the pandemic during the surge of COVID-19 cases.

The Commissioner of Health, Deputy Commissioner, Medical Director, and other senior leadership of OCHD had continued engagement with the health systems, medical community, senior facilities, schools, colleges, day care facilities, and community partners to best respond to the needs of all citizens.

After the FDA issued Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the first two COVID-19 vaccinations, Pfizer on December 11, 2020 and Moderna on December 18, 2020, OCHD announced its first vaccination clinic at the War Memorial on December 28, 2020 using the Moderna vaccine. This was the beginning of the mass vaccination effort lead by OCHD.

The Commissioner of Health remained in regular contact with the County Executive to provide data-driven policy recommendations regarding masks, testing, closures, and enforcements and reopening of the community that were aligned with guidance from NYSDOH.

Additionally, despite being in the middle of the worst pandemic of the century, the Commissioner continued to lead the department with the continuation of core public health functions, from addressing the worsening opioid epidemic and mental health crisis to increases in non-COVID infectious diseases like tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, and sexually transmitted diseases. A comprehensive flu vaccination initiative was undertaken in the midst of the COVID pandemic to prepare for two possible epidemics at the same time.



OCHD's first COVID-19 vaccination clinic on December 28, 2020 at the Onondaga County War Memorial

Community Health

Throughout the pandemic response, [Division of Community Health](#) staff stepped in to fill a variety of critical roles. Staff were involved in the following areas: case investigation; contact tracing; isolation and quarantine notifications and releases; data collection, analysis, and reporting; supply delivery; outreach, and education; database management; media and communications; and material development. Staff also took on topic specific leadership roles as needed, including with K-12 schools and daycares; and supported registration, data collection and analysis, material development, communications, and general operational support for the vaccination clinics.

Despite these significant demands, the Division of Community Health also maintained a number of needed services to the community in 2020, which included providing in-home inspections for children with critically elevated blood lead levels, and case management and environmental assessment services by phone for families of children with elevated blood lead levels. Staff also trained over 75 people virtually on administering naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses, and established a partnership with the Jamesville Correctional Facility and the Onondaga County Justice Center to provide transition services to incarcerated individuals with substance use disorders. The team worked with landlords, municipalities, and worksites to establish over 200 additional smoke-free apartment units throughout Onondaga, Cayuga and Oswego counties, facilitated cancer screening for un- and underinsured residents, and developed and submitted a grant application to continue funding Creating Healthy Schools and Communities.

Disease Control

From the beginning of the pandemic, the Bureau of Disease Control (BDC) staff responded by conducting case investigations and contact tracing. The team works closely with local schools, workplaces, houses of worship, long term care facilities, and more to ensure cases of COVID-19 were identified, isolated, and all close contacts were quarantined. The BDC continued with modified services to meet the safety needs of patients receiving care in the [Sexually Transmitted Disease](#) and [Tuberculosis](#) clinics during the COVID-19 response. Staff utilized telehealth visits, including both phone and video calls, and offered home visits when needed.

Services continued to focus primarily on established patients receiving care through the [PrEP \(Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV\) program](#), and patients receiving care for active tuberculosis. The OCHD worked closely with community partners to ensure patients seeking walk-in testing and other services were connected with local resources that could meet those needs. Throughout the pandemic, Communicable Disease Investigators continued to provide partner services for patients who recently tested positive for HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and/or syphilis, and Communicable Disease Nurses continued to respond to various disease exposures, including Hepatitis A and B and rabies prophylaxis.

Environmental Health

During 2020, most [Division of Environmental Health](#) staff worked as part of the Onondaga County team in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in our community. Staff supervised groups of case investigators, performed contact tracing, were team leaders for case review of K-12 schools and higher education, made deliveries of food and other critical care items to residents, and provided support at vaccination clinics. Environmental Health led the effort on inspections for gyms so that they could re-open safely. The community reached out to staff to review re-opening plans for business to ensure that they complied with NYS guidance. Many of the Division's programs were directly affected by COVID related NYS guidance as permitted facilities were allowed to reopen to the public. Restaurants, hotel/motels, children's camps, public swimming pools, bathing beaches, and campgrounds were carefully kept informed of the changing guidance and Division staff were integral to interpreting guidance and answering questions from facilities. Concerns from the public related to COVID guidelines such as mask wearing and issues with workplace positive employees were investigated and appropriate education was provided.

Although much of the Division's efforts were focused on COVID-related activities, critical public health inspections continued throughout the year. The Division inspected food service facilities, temporary residences, camps, beaches, and weights & measures facilities. Animal bites were investigated, several drive-through rabies vaccination clinics were conducted, and the mosquito program was operational throughout the summer months. Regulatory oversight of public drinking water and reviews of septic systems and subdivisions were maintained throughout the year.

Healthy Families

The [Division of Healthy Families](#) (Maternal and Child Health) staff played a vital role in addressing the needs of the community when the COVID-19 pandemic reached Central New York. Traditional face-to-face public health home visiting and clinical services were suspended, and many services were provided using telephone and remote technologies, including the WIC nutrition program. Public Health Social Workers provided mental health support and referrals to individuals experiencing emotional difficulties. Special Children Services staff continued to meet the mandates for Early Intervention (EI) and Preschool Children with special needs. Families were educated about current public health recommendations regarding COVID-19 prevention practices, and home deliveries provided household cleaning items, masks, diapers, wipes, baby formula, and groceries to underserved and at-risk families.

As COVID-19 cases continued to increase, Healthy Families' staff provided case investigation and contact tracing services. At the end of December 2020, upon the FDA's Emergency Use Authorization of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Health Department's Novel Coronavirus Vaccination Response Plan was activated and COVID-19 vaccine points of distributing (POD) were initiated. The first PODs were held at the War Memorial and then moved to the Oncenter Convention Center to allow more spacing. At these POD sites, the clinical team vaccinated approximately 2,500 to 3,000 individuals per day. Pop-up clinics were also strategically placed at targeted locations allowing for increased accessibility to underrepresented communities to ensure a focus on health equity throughout our vaccination distribution plan.

Center for Forensic Sciences

Forensic Laboratories

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center for Forensic Sciences—[Forensic Laboratories](#) continued to conduct forensic analysis for evidence submitted to the laboratory from submitting agencies in Onondaga County without major interruptions once numerous precautionary measures were implemented to mitigate the spread of possible infection amongst laboratory staff members. The laboratory saw an increase in the number of casework assignments created (i.e. case submissions to the laboratory), and there was also an increase in the number of completed casework assignments for most laboratory sections.

A new discovery law went into effect on January 1, 2020, which had a significant impact on the laboratory. The new law is quite expansive, requiring additional information related to casework analysis, laboratory policies and procedures, and much shorter time frames for providing case materials to prosecutors and defense attorneys. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, courts were largely closed for most of 2020 and thus the full impact of the new discovery law was not felt.

The Forensic Laboratories successfully underwent a full accreditation assessment that was conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic by ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) in September 2020, and the Forensic Biology/DNA Section was also audited to the requirements of the FBI Quality Assurance Standards (QAS) Audit for Forensic DNA Testing Laboratories during the assessment.

Medical Examiner's Office

The [Medical Examiner's Office \(MEO\)](#) participated in County preparations for potential mass casualties including working with New York State on available resources for decedent storage should hospitals become overwhelmed. The MEO performed, and continues to perform, COVID-19 testing on decedents suspected and/or known to have coronavirus infection and added postmortem influenza testing when that became mandated under NYS law.

For protection of staff, the MEO modified internal operations such as movement of staff between the first and second floors of CFS, strengthened cleaning protocols, and extended N95 mask use throughout the morgue and at medicolegal death scene investigations. Detailed COVID-19 autopsy protocols were developed as recommended by the CDC, National Association of Medical Examiners, and the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators and modified throughout the pandemic as needed. For example, modeling our efforts on the plan the Boston, MA MEO made available to the forensic community early in the pandemic, OCMEO developed a system within Forensic Death Investigations to triage decedents as to likelihood of COVID-19 into four tiers, with testing and autopsy precautions flowing from that.

2020 Annual Data

Essential Services

Community Health

Cancer Services

Number of patients screened	177
Clinical breast exams	87
Mammograms	157
Pap tests	30
Colorectal Fecal Immunochemical Test Kits	43
Follow-up diagnostic procedures	126
Cancers diagnosed	2

Lead Program

New initial lead inspections conducted	94
Properties with lead hazards identified	76

* Data and maps related to blood lead testing activities for 2013-2020 can be found [here](#).

Mental Health and Substance Use Initiatives

Individuals trained in naloxone administration	77
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Disease Control

Reportable Diseases

All reportable diseases (including flu)	3,787
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Tuberculosis Control

Tuberculin skin tests	49
Individuals started on TLTBI	28
T-SPOT tests	19
Active TB cases	10

Rabies

Cases of possible rabies exposure investigated by staff	374
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Sexually Transmitted Disease

Total patient visits to the STD Center	683
Cases of Chlamydia	2,871
Cases of Gonorrhea	1,402
Cases of Syphilis	28

Environmental Health**Food Protection**

Restaurants inspected	1,121
Food-related complaints investigated	197

Temporary Residence & Recreational Facilities

Facilities inspected	256
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Animal Disease

Animal bites investigated	813
Rabies specimens submitted for testing	348
Rabies-positive animals	15
Animals vaccinated for rabies	264

Mosquito Control Program

Mosquitoes collected	78,251
WNV positive mosquito pools	0
EEEV positive mosquito pools	6

Adolescent Tobacco Use Prevention (ATUPA) Program

Tobacco compliance checks performed	400
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Public Health Engineering

Septic system plans approved	144
Individual sewage installations inspected	66
Realty subdivision lots approved for water and sewer	149
In-depth sanitary survey inspections	118

Weights and Measures

Facilities inspected	778
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Healthy Families

Home Visitation Services

Total referrals received (unduplicated)	1,378
Total clients served (unduplicated)	1,790

Immunization

General Immunization Clinic, total served (adults & children)	341
COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic, total served	1,046

WIC

Enrolled participants	9,049
Participants issued checks	8,125

Early Intervention

Children referred from all sources	1,345
Cases closed	1,359

Preschool Special Education

School districts served	22
Children served during school year (9-1-19 to 6-30-20)	1,458
Children served during summer (7-1-20 to 8-31-20)	1,400

Center for Forensic Sciences

Medical Examiner's Office

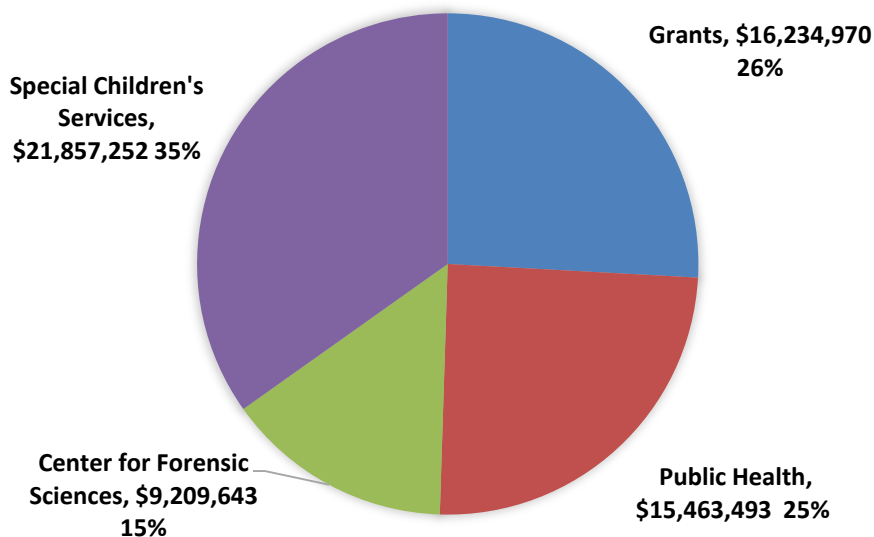
Total cases	3,089
Investigated and released from MEO jurisdiction	1,780
Expert consultation cases	3
Medical Examiner cases	1,306
Autopsy examinations	957
External examinations	205
Death certificate only – no examination	144
Manner of death	
• Accident	637
• Homicide	57
• Natural	453
• Suicide	107
• Undetermined	40
• Other/not applicable	12
Scene Response	580
Forensic Toxicology	1,098

Forensic Laboratories

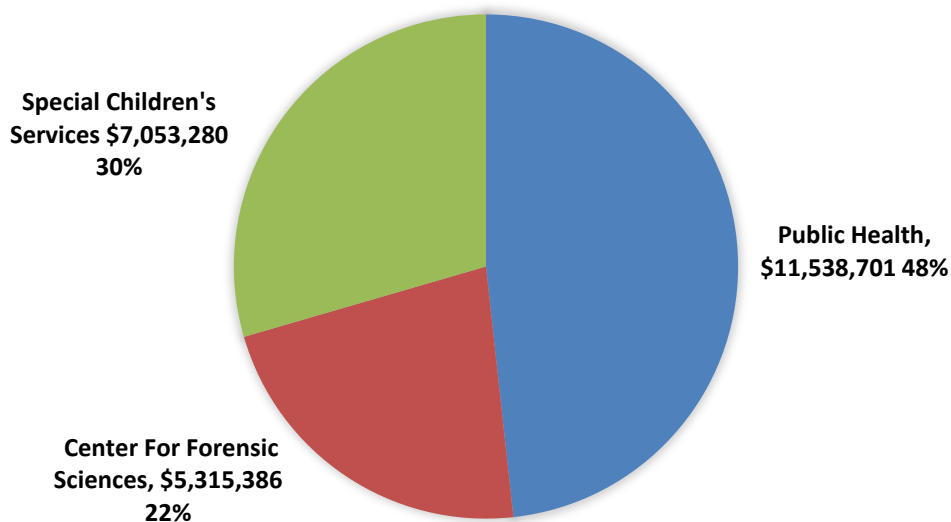
Case assignments completed/closed	3,677
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2020 Schedule of Expenditures and Revenues

2020 EXPENSES: \$62,765,358



2020 LOCAL: \$23,907,368



GRANT PROJECTS, 2020

Administration	\$7,213,146
Community Health	\$1,862,879
Disease Control	\$933,273
Environmental Health	\$593,552
Maternal and Child Health	\$4,568,261
Center for Forensic Sciences	\$1,063,858

TOTAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT: \$16,234,970



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