



# APACHE COUNTY

## Public Health Services District

### ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Calendar Year 2024

According to A.R.S. §§ 36-186 it is a requirement of the Director of the Apache County Public Health Services District to report on the health and well-being of the residents of the county to the Board of Supervisors annually. In this report, specific diseases, expenditures, and any recommendations will be shared with the Board to keep them informed as to the general health-related welfare of their constituents.

Apache County residents in 2024 were generally healthy. Covid-19 infections appeared to be declining based on the CDC's Covid-19 epidemic trend model and all other disease outbreaks were minimal throughout the year. One ongoing concern to all those who preside over Apache County residents is access to proper health care and sanitation. Another concern is the lack of hospital services in the area. Travel to hospitals or care clinics can be extensive, and in some instances has led to lack of proper healthcare. This alone can have a detrimental effect on the overall health of a county population, but despite some of these challenges, county residents have been healthy overall.

The Health District has continued its efforts in public education and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Our Clinical Services Division offered Covid-19 testing, vaccinations, blood draws, and education opportunities from trained nursing staff. The Health District provided a wide variety of immunizations for both children and adults. Additionally, we offered special programs for youth to help them make appropriate decisions in their life's choices, ranging from personal health choices to proper nutrition.

The Health District offered a home visitation program that helped mothers prepare for parturition and those who have already given birth, regarding proper childhood nutrition and how to help their children develop both physically and mentally.

The Health District continued monitoring local bars, restaurants, hotels/motels, and other food establishments, helping them to comply with health and safety guidelines and to form healthy habits that will keep them in compliance. We continued supporting new construction in our county with residents who are interested in developing their property with septic and well installation. We respond to complaints about waste and other practices that have an overall detrimental effect on the health and overall environmental well-being of our residents.

Highlights in 2024 included winning the Hot Shot Innovation Award and completing the renovation of the Springerville Health Clinic. Apache County Public Health Services District was nominated for and winner of the Hot Shot Innovation Award. The Hot Shot Innovation Award is in honor of Carole Joyce, a nurse from Mountain Park Health Center. Carole understood the benefits of the registry and data to keep kids on track and described herself as, "a nurse with a syringe in one hand and a mouse in the other."

*The Apache County Public Health Services District has achieved remarkable success in increasing vaccine coverage throughout the county. They take great pride in their outreach efforts, particularly to staff at the Apache County Sheriff's Office and inmates housed at the Apache County Jail. Building trusting relationships with employees at the sheriff's office has been key to their success. By fostering these relationships, they were able to offer vaccination Points of Dispensing (PODs) specifically for employees. As a result, an impressive 91% of sheriff's office employees are now up to date on their vaccines. This successful model was also replicated for the county jail, where a dedicated POD for inmates resulted in administering 62 vaccines to 22 individuals. Since July 2023, the district's staff has gone above and beyond by conducting reminder recall efforts, reaching out to 879 patients. Remarkably, 164 of these calls led to patients scheduling appointments for vaccines.*

February 2024 began with renovating the Springerville Health Clinic, including new flooring and paint throughout, demolition/rebuilding of walls/doors, cabinetry/fixtures, and reorganization of office space that improved the flow, function and experience for patients and staff.

The following information reported on specific diseases below is based on these specific diseases rates of occurrence, their character, and their overall impact on county residents throughout 2024.

#### **REPORTABLE DISEASES IN APACHE COUNTY VS. STATE OF ARIZONA**

The diseases listed below are for calendar year 2024 and appear pertaining to their occurrence. *Source: azdhs.gov.*

| <b>Disease</b>                        | <b>Apache County</b> | <b>State Total</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Campylobacteriosis                    | 27                   | 1,482              |
| Coccidioidomycosis                    | 64                   | 15,004             |
| Cryptosporidiosis                     | 0                    | 146                |
| E. Coli, Shinga Toxin-Producing       | 7                    | 360                |
| Giardiasis                            | 2                    | 192                |
| H. influenzae, Invasive, non B        | 4                    | 148                |
| H. influenzae, Invasive, Type B       | 0                    | 1                  |
| Hepatitis A                           | 0                    | 38                 |
| Hepatitis B chronic                   | 0                    | 1,001              |
| Legionellosis                         | 4                    | 149                |
| Malaria                               | 0                    | 34                 |
| MRSA, Invasive                        | 15                   | 1,566              |
| Pertussis                             | 5                    | 787                |
| Salmonellosis                         | 14                   | 1,165              |
| Shigellosis                           | 1                    | 554                |
| Streptococcal Group A, invasive       | 10                   | 1,319              |
| Streptococcal Group B, invasive, <90d | 0                    | 29                 |
| Streptococcus pneumoniae, Invasive    | 19                   | 1,152              |
| Vibrio infection                      | 0                    | 69                 |
| West Nile virus                       | 0                    | 31                 |

**Campylobacteriosis:** Causes diarrhea in humans. Other symptoms can be abdominal pain, malaise, fever, nausea, and/or vomiting, and bloody stools. Typically carried by cattle, but also known to be carried by sheep, cats, swine, and dogs. Usually foodborne, and associated with eating raw, or undercooked food. It can also be in water sources that have had contact with raw meats.

**Coccidioidomycosis:** (Valley Fever) Symptoms include fatigue, cough, fever, headaches, night sweats, muscle or joint pain, and possibly a rash on upper body or legs. This is caused by breathing spores from a fungus that lives in the soil in many parts of the southwest.

**Cryptosporidiosis:** Caused by a parasite found in stool that causes diarrhea in humans. This infection is caused by eating or drinking water that is contaminated with stool. This is most often spread by swallowing recreational water (swimming pools, lakes, rivers, and waterparks that are infected).

**E. coli, Shiga Toxin-Producing:** Is a bacterium that normally lives in the intestines of humans but is also found in the gut of some animals. Some symptoms of *E. coli* poisoning could be abdominal cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, and in some instances, bloody diarrhea. Typically contracted through contaminated food or water.

**Giardiasis:** A common illness caused by a parasite that may result in diarrhea and stomach cramps. The Giardia parasite can spread through contaminated water, food and surfaces, and from contact with someone who has it. Antibiotics can treat giardiasis.

**H. influenzae, Invasive:** A kind of bacteria that can cause infections ranging from mild (such as bronchitis) to severe (such as septic arthritis). Treatment includes antibiotics but you may also require hospitalization depending on the severity of your condition. Invasive, which means the bacteria invade parts of your body that are normally free from germs. For instance, *H. influenzae* can invade the fluid surrounding your spinal cord and brain, which can cause meningitis, the swelling of the lining of your brain and spinal cord. Invasive diseases usually require hospital treatment and can sometimes be fatal.

**H. influenzae, Type B:** A type of bacteria that can cause several different kinds of infections ranging from mild, such as ear infections to severe, such as bloodstream infections. The infections typically affect children younger than 5 years old, adults 65 years and older, or can affect people who are immunocompromised.

**Hepatitis A:** A highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus that causes liver inflammation and affects your liver's ability to function. Infection comes from contaminated food or water or persons or objects that are infected. Mild cases don't require treatment, and most people recover completely with no permanent liver damage. Practicing good hygiene, including washing hands frequently, can prevent the spread of the virus. The hepatitis A vaccine can protect against hepatitis A.

**Hepatitis B, chronic:** A serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). For most people, hepatitis B is short term and lasts less than six months. But for others, the infection lasts more than six months and is called chronic. Chronic hepatitis B raises the risk of liver failure, liver cancer and serious scarring of the liver called cirrhosis. Most adults with hepatitis B recover fully, even if their symptoms are bad. Infants and children are more likely to develop a chronic, long-lasting hepatitis B virus infection. Hepatitis B symptoms

may include pain in the abdomen, dark urine, fever, joint pain, loss of appetite, upset stomach and vomiting, weakness and extreme tiredness, and jaundice.

**Legionellosis:** This disease is a serious type of pneumonia you get when Legionella bacteria infect your lungs. Symptoms include high fever, cough, diarrhea and confusion. You can get Legionnaires' disease from water or cooling systems in large buildings, like hospitals or hotels. Legionnaires' disease can be life-threatening.

**Malaria:** A life-threatening illness caused by parasites that you get through the bite of an infected mosquito. It's most common in tropical areas where it's hot and humid, like Africa and South Asia where most cases happen. Antimalarial medications can cure it, but without treatment, can cause brain damage, organ failure and death. If you're traveling to an area where malaria is common, talk to a healthcare provider about ways you can prevent being infected.

**MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus), invasive:** A Staphylococcus bacterium that is resistant to several different antibiotics. MRSA is spread throughout the community by contact with infected people, or things that carry the bacteria. This includes through contact with a contaminated wound or by sharing personal items, such as towels, razors, or other products that have touched the skin. Symptoms of MRSA infection depend upon which part of the body is infected. Skin infection can be swelling, redness, pain, and warmth in the infected area. These types of infections generally require IV antibiotics, and patient isolation.

**Pertussis:** Whooping cough or the "100-day cough" is a respiratory infection known for the high-pitched "whoop" sound some people make after coughing. Pertussis affects people of all ages but usually causes the most severe symptoms in infants. Antibiotics stop the infection from spreading to others and may make symptoms less severe. The three stages of whooping cough are common cold symptoms, coughing fits, and gradual recovery.

**Salmonellosis:** Causes diarrhea, stomach cramps, and fever. Certain strains can cause infection in blood, bones, urine, and nervous system. It can cause severe disease in some cases. Infected people can get it from a variety of sources, but typically it is from eating contaminated food or water, or touching infected animals, their feces, or their environment.

**Shigellosis:** A bacterium that causes abdominal pain, fever, dehydration, tenesmus, vomiting, diarrhea, and bloody/mucoid stools. Infection is usually initiated by ingestion (via fecal-oral route). This is common in developing countries where sanitation is poor.

**Streptococcal Group A, invasive:** A bacterial infection that is generally found on the skin or in the throat of an infected individual. It is spread via direct contact with infected wounds or sores on skin, or nasal or oral discharge of an infected individual. Most people with GAS are carriers but do not display symptoms of the disease. Risk of spreading disease is highest when the individual is ill, such as having a "strep throat" infection or an infected wound. In wounds, this type of infection can lead to necrotizing fasciitis and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS). These types of infections are treated with antibiotics.

**Streptococcus Group B, invasive, <90 Days:** Group B strep is a bacterial infection babies can get during delivery or in their first weeks of life. It can cause serious complications. During pregnancy, you'll be screened for group B strep. Antibiotics can treat the infection if you test positive. Most adults don't experience symptoms of group B strep. It can cause symptoms in older people or people with certain medical conditions, but this is rare, and may include

fever, chills and fatigue, difficulty breathing, chest pains, and muscle stiffness. Newborns have symptoms like fever, difficulty feeding, irritability, breathing difficulties, and lack of energy.

**Streptococcus pneumoniae, invasive:** A bacterium that is a common inhabitant of the respiratory tract and causes pneumonia respiratory infections. Symptoms include chest pain when breathing deeply, a cough, difficulty breathing, an elevated heart rate, and elevated respiration rates. This can lead to low oxygen saturations, sepsis, and death.

**Vibrio infection:** A type of bacteria that can cause a fatal infection. You get it from eating uncooked or undercooked shellfish or when seawater enters a wound. *Vibrio vulnificus* live in warm, mildly salty (brackish) water, usually where areas of fresh water like rivers meet salty seawater. Symptoms get worse quickly and include fever, low blood pressure, sepsis, and painful blisters. Go to the ER immediately if you think you have a *Vibrio* infection.

**West Nile Virus:** The leading mosquito-borne disease in the United States. This is spread to people from an infected mosquito bite. These types of infections are generally found during mosquito season (summer through fall). Most people infected with WNV do not develop symptoms. For those that do develop symptoms, most are mild. In rare cases, infections can be fatal. To prevent WNL infections, wear insect repellent, long-sleeves, and pants, which will prevent mosquito bites.

## 2024 HEALTH DISTRICT SERVICES

### CLINICAL SERVICES

#### Immunization Program

The Health District continued to offer immunizations such as Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Meningococcal ACWY, Meningococcal B, MMR, Varicella, Polio, Rotavirus, HPV, Tdap, DTaP, and Typhoid to both children and adults in Apache County during 2024. Respiratory vaccinations such as Influenza, Pneumonia, RSV, and the Covid-19 Booster were given in both clinics, as well as our vaccination PODs (Points of Distribution) throughout the fall of this year. We also provided drive-through vaccination services to the general public during our PODs which increased the accessibility of vaccines to residents and employees of the county, especially those who do not live in close proximity to our clinics. This was mainly in response to the increased need for the yearly flu vaccination as well as COVID-19 vaccinations. Our Clinical Team set up PODs in Chinle, Ganado, Sanders, St. Johns, Springerville, Greer, Concho, Vernon and Alpine.

For the first time since 2021, the CDC updated Covid-19 isolation guidance and ended the 5-day isolation recommendation for Covid-19. This decision was primarily based on how a person's symptoms progress and aligned Covid-19 recommendations with other respiratory viruses, such as influenza and RSV. Also, ADHS ended its free program that provided free Covid-19 test kits for the county, simultaneously ending Covid-19 testing for the Health District. Both the St. Johns and Round Valley health clinics were open Monday–Thursday from 6:30AM–5:30PM. Walk-ins were welcome, but appointments were highly recommended.

#### Family Planning Program & Well Woman

Health District clinical staff continued to provide women's health care services for individuals who are uninsured or underinsured. Our Family Planning Program provided women with initial

or annual exams, which included pap smears, STD testing, pregnancy tests, HIV rapid tests, urinalysis, breast exam, and birth control methods.

The Well Woman program was a contracted service we provided to patients of North County Healthcare (NCHC). In September of 2024 we cancelled our contract with NCHC as their provider for Well Woman HealthCheck services. NCHC no longer referred clients for services as they hired a provider for their Round Valley location.

### **Tuberculosis Control Program**

Health District clinical staff continued to provide services to prevent and detect TB in our community. In 2024, no clients were identified with latent or active TB. Health District clinical staff worked with our community partners and ensured our community was aware of the services we provided including TB skin tests. We offered TB skin tests to Apache County residents for a \$10 fee per test.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

### **Inspections & Licenses**

Environmental Health inspected and issued septic permits, performed restaurant inspections, provided food handler education and certification, investigated compliance complaints, and responded to vector control reports received from county residents and/or our state partners. Our goal for 2024 was to maintain uniform processes and positive working relationships with residents and our community partners.

### **Smoke Free AZ**

Environmental Health visited businesses to educate retail establishment about the Smoke-Free AZ Act, answered questions, and provided signage and other resources. Once again, Apache county received zero complaints during 2024, so no investigations were necessary. Overall, in the state of Arizona, smoking complaints have dropped state-wide. Efforts are proving to have a positive impact across the state as well as here in Apache County.

## **EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

### **Health Start Program**

Health Start is a home visitation program that provided education, support and advocacy services to pregnant and postpartum women and their infants 0-2 throughout southern Apache County through this program. We met with clients face-to-face either in their homes, our office, or in the community such as the park, McDonalds or the library. Phone visits were provided to clients in rare instances when face-to-face visits were not possible. In 2024 the State made numerous changes to the Health Start program, including a new director, and substantial program changes following a yearlong review.

### **Tobacco Program**

The Health District assisted smokers in disparate or high-risk populations with tobacco prevention and cessation services through training and referral services to the ASHLine. We were able to institute a STAND (Students Taking a New Direction) Coalition at Round Valley High School Although this was a rebuilding year, we were able to hire a new team member toward the end of 2024 and the beginning of extensive training with state partners.

## **Health in Arizona Policy Initiative (HAPI)**

This program addresses the four leading chronic disease deaths, at-or-high risk populations, co-morbidities, and/or health risks. This also was a training year for ACPHSD due to positions being filled with new staff.

### **Maternal Child Health**

Public Health continued to offer education services to residents in our surrounding communities. Comprehensive car seat education was provided to families, caregivers and staff who transported children. Public Health had several certified car seat technicians that hosted car seat check events quarterly. If a car seat was expired or the wrong seat for the child, a certified technician provided one to the parent/caregiver and ensured proper installation. Program staff have developed strong, working relationships with Nahata'Dziil Health Center, fire departments county wide, and other counties for shared support.

Also, with the help of our home visitation staff and other programs that serve women, evidence based and/or evidence informed education regarding Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome (SUIDS), was provided to families with infants from birth to around 1 year of age. Families in need of a safe sleeping environment were provided with a pack-n-play and a safe sleep supply bag. Safe Sleep supply bags included a fitted sheet, pacifier, sleep sack, temperature room gauge, children's reading book, and additional safe sleep information for grandparents, babysitters, or fathers.

### **Women, Infant, Children (WIC)**

WIC is a federally funded health program through the United States Department of Agriculture which provided eligible Arizona residents the following free WIC services:

- Access to nutrition experts for pregnancy, breastfeeding, infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- Personalized nutrition tips from a registered dietician and support for parents and caregivers.
- Breastfeeding information, support and resources.
- Referrals to other community resources and healthy foods.

In 2024, Arizona WIC continued in the south-west region with the goal of increasing our caseload within the funding brackets for our region. Our funding increased from approximately \$97,808 per year to \$108,152 per year with a mid-year amendment in June. We were also approved to increase our funding to \$175,974 for the 2025-2030 WIC funding cycle.

## **GENERAL HEALTH**

### **Vital Records**

The Health District issued certified copies of vital records including birth, death, fetal death certificates and certificates of birth resulting in stillbirth for events that occurred in Arizona. We also provided same day walk in customer service for corrections or amendments to birth and death records such as:

- Corrections/amendments to records for births that occurred 1997 to the present.
- Corrections/amendments to records for deaths that occurred 2008 to the present.
- Corrections/amendments to records for fetal deaths that occurred 2013 to the present.

In 2024 we continued our vital records outreach on the Navajo Nation to provide service for county residents living on the Navajo Nation. We encourage residents to call for an appointment which allowed us to discover the individual needs of the resident and explain what will be needed so the appointment can be as successful as possible. Appointments were available on the second Tuesday and Wednesday of each month at the Administration Complex's for District II and District I respectively. In 2024, we provided 185 records in Ganado and 328 records in Chinle for a total of 513 records. We were very pleased with these results and look forward to continuing these services going forward.

### **Alternate Medical Examiner**

Per ARS 11 and 36, Apache County provided Alternate Medical Examiner services for southern Apache County. In 2024, we responded to 97 dispatch notifications of death and 26 autopsies were requested.

With the resignation of our alternate medical examiner in December 2023, we were faced with the challenge of rebuilding this program. We contracted (\$150,000) with Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME) as acting medical examiner for ACPHSD. PCOME triaged deaths via phone, on scene with law enforcement to determine if a death was a medical examiner case; if so, they invoke jurisdiction, if not they decline jurisdiction. During the transition from our previous program to working with PCOME, Mr. Gene Hernandez, Chief Medicolegal Death Investigator for PCOME provided virtual training in April and in-person trainings in May. All law enforcement agencies, medical emergency services, hospitals, and mortuaries in Apache County were invited to a presentation and Q&A.

We contracted with Burnham Mortuary to provide removals for medical examiner case and provide transport to autopsy in Pima County. We also contracted with Green Meadow Funeral Home to provided removals on I-40 and north.

### **EXPENDITURE REPORT**

In 2024, the Apache County Public Health Services District expended \$3,835,346 in program services assigned to Public Health Services District and public health related activities.

Approximately 51% (\$1,941,027) of Apache County Public Health Services District's budget came from specific grants, and 40% (\$1,522,937) was from tax levy and Salt River Project's Coronado Generating Station. Other revenue 6% (\$243,128) was due to charge for services. Licenses and permits made up approximately 3% (\$128,218) of our revenue.

### **DIRECTORS RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE OVERALL HEALTH OF APACHE COUNTY**

The general recommendations for all communicable diseases were to follow the guidance set forth by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS).

We continued reporting to Apache County residents on our Public Health Facebook. We continued to provide free testing and vaccinations to the citizens of Apache County. We also required that our nursing staff provided isolation orders and education when individuals were tested in our clinics. We continued to push for good personal hygiene in schools, workplaces, and homes.

We continued to supply our partners with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 rapid test (BinaxNOW) test kits. We continued to follow the isolation recommended by CDC and ADHS and continued to update the public as the numbers of Covid-19 cases were reported to our county.

We continued to offer vaccinations for other preventable diseases, such as flu, pneumococcal, tetanus, pertussis, diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, shingles, Rotavirus, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella, polio, haemophiles, influenzae type B, human papillomavirus, meningococca1, and Covid-19 vaccines. Ensuring that children and adults continued to get these vaccines allowed for other disease outbreaks to be better controlled in our community.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kimberly Cole, MS, MFT  
Health Director

