

BULLETIN

A PUBLICATION OF THE COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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HEALTH OFFICER NOTES

Penny Borenstein, M.D., M.P.H.

NEW HEALTH DATA HUB FOR SLO COUNTY



I am pleased to let you know about a new health data hub from the Public Health Department: SLO Health Counts. This hub provides accurate, relevant, local data from multiple sources in one place, in a tool that is easy to search and a format that is easy to understand. It also provides important points of comparison, such as state and national averages, Healthy People 2020 goals, and trends over time. It allows you to see at a glance how SLO County compares to other counties—in California and nationwide—on a given indicator.

SLO Health Counts includes more than 120 specific indicators. This includes health factors, such as maternal and child health, e.g. teen birth rates; infectious diseases; e.g., STD and Valley Fever incidence; social determinants of health, such as such as median household income and educational attainment; and more. The hub connects these indicators to evidence-based practices and case studies from across the nation. It also includes information about funding sources.

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My hope is that SLO Health Counts will be a practical resource that helps people in our communities—from the medical and public health worlds to policy makers, researchers, entrepreneurs and many others—to find and use relevant health data.

For our work in public health, the power of data is monumental. Accurate, relevant information helps us determine how to most effectively direct limited resources and where to find assets we can leverage to make positive change. It helps us understand who is most vulnerable to health threats and most needs our attention.

While we in public health may have a special affection for this data, we recognize that it does not belong to us. We believe our community will be a healthier place when everyone has ready access to this information and can use it to take action. As a local health department, we are uniquely well-positioned to gather this data and make it available; this is a role and an opportunity we embrace. It also puts us in good company, as local health departments across the nation move to create and present data hubs in their communities. I believe this is a positive trend in our field and I am pleased our department is part of it. Only armed with robust data can we make informed choices about where to expend our capital.

SLO Health Counts is also an indicator of things to come in the conversations around health in our community. The Public Health Department, in collaboration with HEAL SLO, ACTION for Healthy Communities and other community groups, will

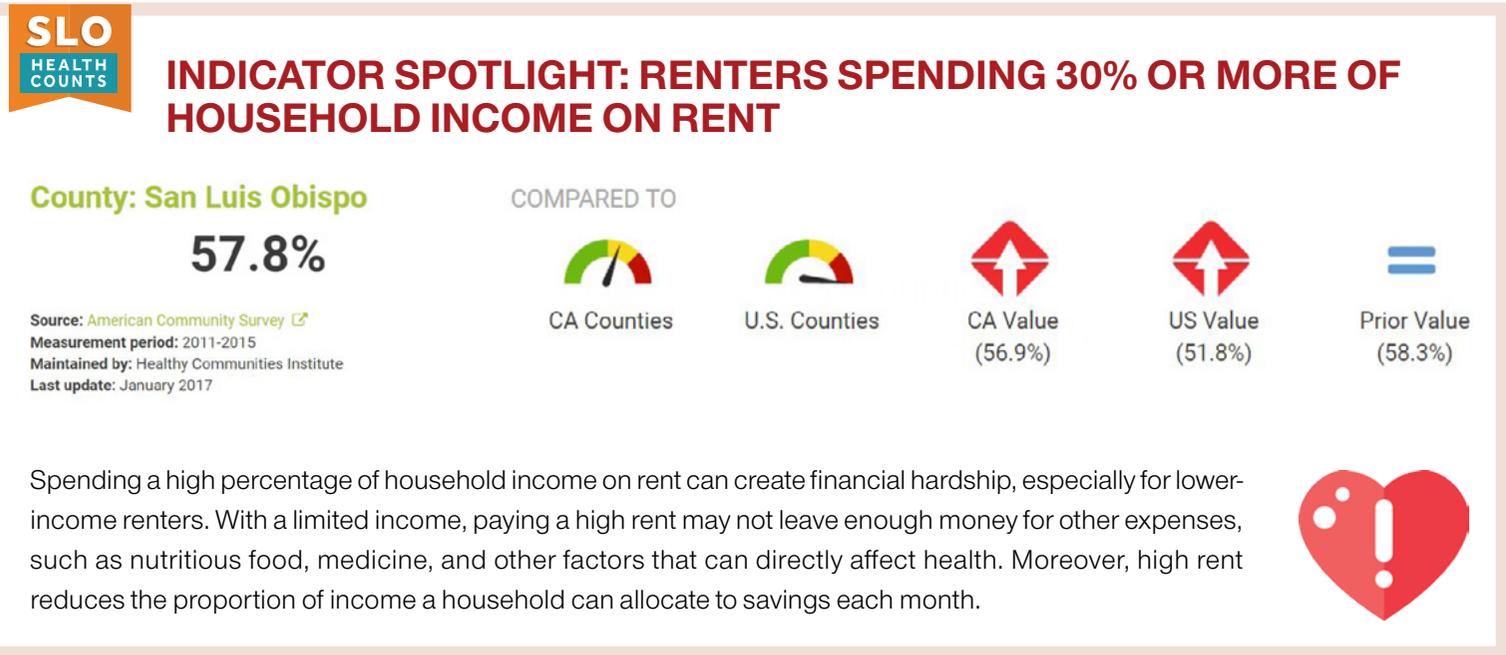
use this data in strategy discussions focused on health in our region. These data-informed discussions in the coming months will feed into an overarching health improvement plan, enable selection of priority areas and health goals, and create a road map for how we might collectively achieve them. Stay posted for more on this process.

On a logistics note, the data in SLO Health Counts is updated whenever source data is updated. This is done automatically by the Healthy Communities Institute, which runs the back-end for many sections of the data hub. In time, we will add expanded local data, including points from the recent ACTION for Healthy Communities survey and report.

Throughout this issue, you will see spotlights on data available from SLO Health Counts. I encourage you to visit the site for more, and to share SLO Health Counts with your networks. I also welcome your feedback and contributions. Please feel free to contact me to share your input and discuss your ideas for sharing local health data in our community.

Together, we can use this data to inform our pursuit of a stronger, healthier SLO County.

Thank you for your attention,



WHAT DOES AN INCREASE IN VALLEY FEVER MEAN FOR SLO COUNTY?

Valley Fever, long considered an overlooked disease, made headlines locally and across California in 2017. The reason? It appears to be on the rise, particularly in endemic regions such as San Luis Obispo County.

Valley Fever (coccidioidomycosis, or cocci) is caused by breathing in the spores of the fungus *Coccidioides*, which lives naturally in the soil in SLO County as well as the Central Valley region and other parts of the southwest. When soil is disturbed—by wind, construction, even gardening or biking—people can breathe in the fungal spores and develop Valley Fever. More than 60 percent of people who become infected do not experience any symptoms; around 30-40 percent develop flu-like symptoms. Most people get well on their own within weeks. Between one and five percent experience a disseminated form of the disease that can cause lifelong complications or death.

Now, Valley Fever appears to be increasing. California's extended drought followed by winter rains have created conditions for *Coccidioides* to proliferate. Infection and diagnosis typically follow a seasonal pattern: as soil dries and people spend more time outdoors, infections increase. Diagnoses often peak in October, after patients experience prolonged illness and other causes have been ruled out.

Research from the California Department of Public Health, published in the August 11 edition of the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), shows Valley Fever has increased significantly since 1995, when it became an individually reportable illness. 2016 saw 5,372 reported cases, the highest number recorded to date in California.

"For health care providers in SLO County, this increase is a reminder to think Valley Fever," said Health Officer Dr. Penny Borenstein. "Keeping it top of mind—especially during the summer and fall—supports early diagnosis and care."

Research shows that when people are aware of Valley Fever, they are more likely to be diagnosed earlier and receive treatment if they need it. That research was the driving force behind the Public Health Department's 2017 public awareness campaign, with efforts ranging from press and social media outreach to a Board of Supervisors resolution recognizing August as Valley Fever Awareness Month. The campaign emphasized two simple messages:

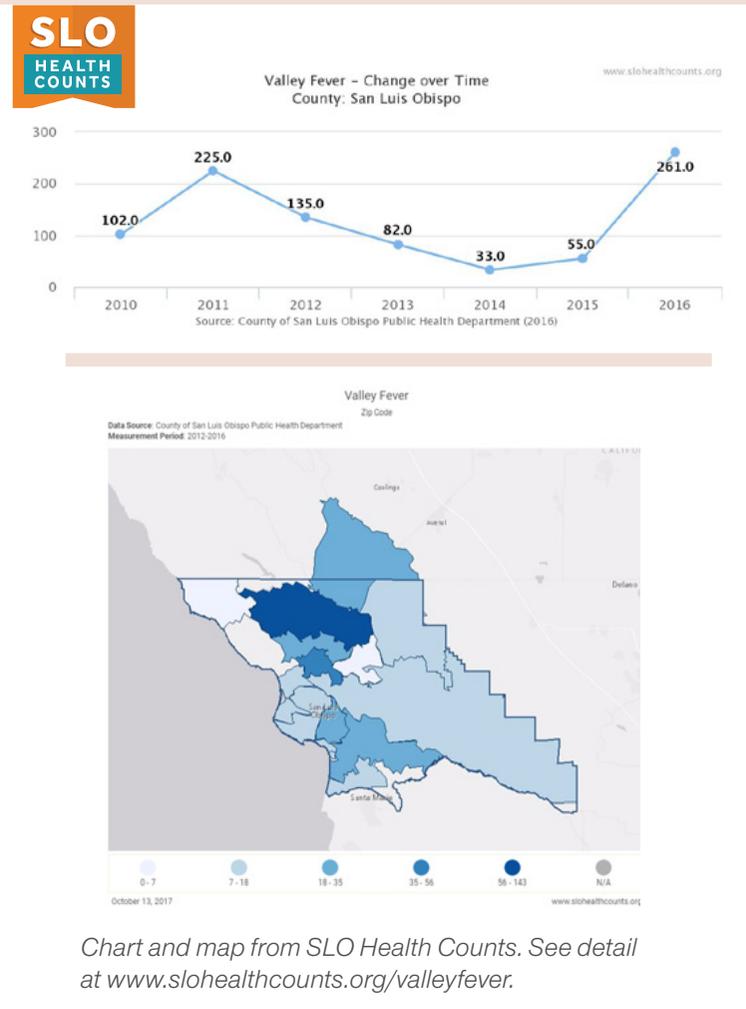


Chart and map from SLO Health Counts. See detail at www.slohealthcounts.org/valleyfever.

- **Avoid breathing dust and dirt in the air.** Try to avoid areas with a lot of dust, especially on windy days. During dust storms, stay inside and close your windows. If you drive on a dusty road, close car windows and set the A/C to recirculate. If you need to spend time in a dusty area, take precautions such as dampening the soil so it doesn't drift or wearing a NIOSH-approved respirator.
- **Talk with your doctor.** If you develop severe flu-like symptoms that last more than a few weeks, tell your doctor and ask to be tested for Valley Fever along with other possible causes.

For healthcare providers, the Valley Fever Center for Excellence at the University of Arizona provides clinical specifics and free CME at www.vfce.arizona.edu.

Learn more about Valley Fever in SLO County at www.slocounty.ca.gov/valley-fever. ■

MORE CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL WITH ALL REQUIRED IMMUNIZATIONS

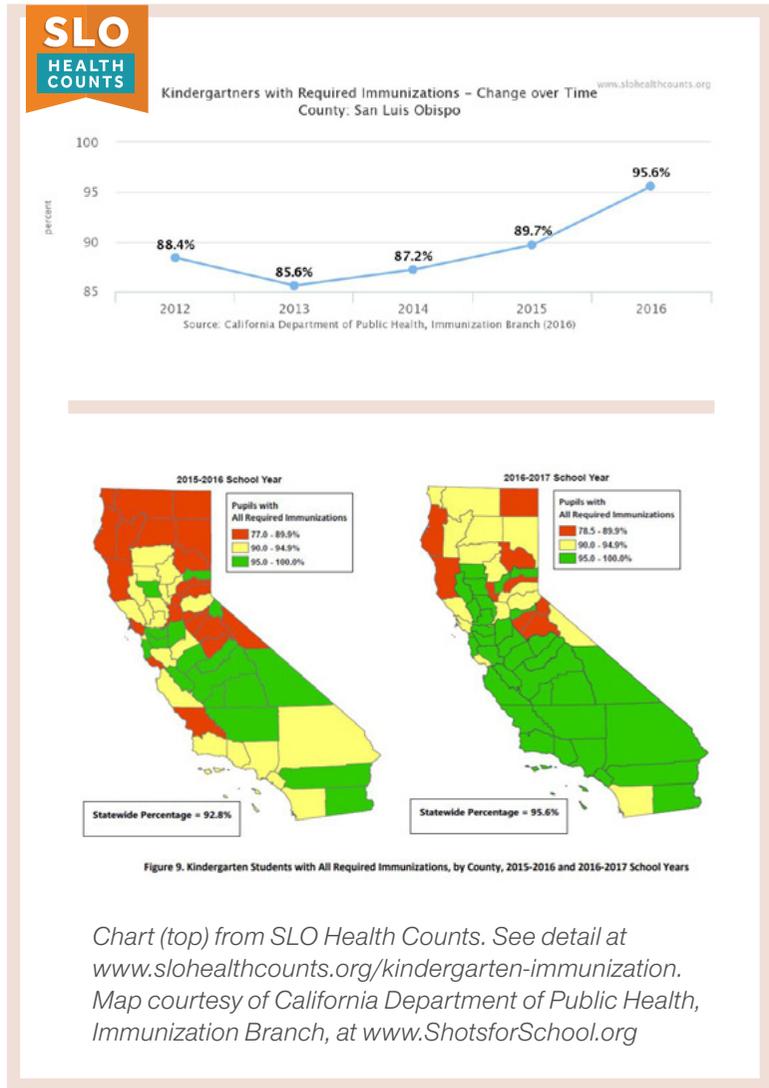
SLO County and our neighbors across California have made important progress in the number of children starting child care and kindergarten with all required immunizations.

- **Child care.** The number of students starting child care with all required immunizations increased from 87.9 percent (2015-16) to 93 percent (2016-17).
- **Kindergarten.** The number of students starting kindergarten with all required immunizations increased from 89.7% (2015-16) to 95.6% (2016-17). Most of the students who didn't yet have all required immunizations were in the process of completing a vaccine series.

These increases follow the 2016 implementation of SB277, which eliminated the personal belief exemption from vaccine requirements for children enrolling in public or private school in California. Of the students who do not yet have all required immunizations, many are conditionally enrolled as they complete series of vaccines that must be spaced apart, and a small number have medical exemptions.

Increased vaccination rates mean all students are safer from vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

Visit www.slocounty.ca.gov/school-shots for details on required school shots and where to get them. Visit www.shotsforschool.org to see immunization rates for California counties and specific schools. ■



INDICATOR SPOTLIGHT: CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH ASTHMA

County: San Luis Obispo
15.6%

Source: California Health Interview Survey
Measurement period: 2011-2015
Maintained by: Healthy Communities Institute
Last update: July 2017

COMPARED TO



CA Counties
(2014-2015)



CA Value
(14.9%)



Prior Value
(22.1%)

The National Health Interview Survey has found that people under 18 years of age have higher rates of asthma than any other age group. Asthma in children results in missed days of school, limitations on daily activities, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations. Moreover, asthma disproportionately affects low-income and minority children. This indicator shows that from 2011-2015, 15.6 percent of people age 1-17 in San Luis Obispo County had been diagnosed with asthma.



BEHIND THE NUMBERS: INVESTIGATING STDS IN SLO COUNTY



Nationwide and in SLO County, STD rates are rising. In SLO County, communicable disease investigator Sonia Garcia follows up on STD diagnoses to ensure patients receive proper treatment and are able to refer their partners. In cases of syphilis and gonorrhea, she personally calls every patient, sends letters and sometimes knocks on doors. She visits clinics when

patients receive syphilis treatment to hear their concerns and talk about treatment. While the conversations aren't always easy, she said, patients nearly always appreciate that she cares about their health and stopping the disease. She con-

tacts partners to ensure they also receive testing and treatment if needed.

"My biggest goal is to stop the diseases," Sonia said. "Every day, it's rewarding to know I made a difference for someone."

Dr. Penny Borenstein, Health Officer of the County of San Luis Obispo, put it this way: "Sonia is making a difference to limit the spread of STDs in our county and ensure patients receive the treatment they need. As rates of STDs rise nationwide, this work is more important than ever."

To protect yourself and limit the spread of STDs, remember: get tested and use a condom for every sexual encounter. Find information about STD testing and treatment at Public Health clinics at www.slocounty.ca.gov/std-test. ■

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY REPORTED CASES OF SELECTED COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

DISEASE	YEAR 2016					YEAR 2017				
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Total Cases	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Year to Date
AIDS/HIV	1 4	1 2	1 5	0 5	3 16	1 0	0 7	0 1		1 8
Campylobacteriosis	1	17	20	12	50	9	20	31		60
Chlamydial Infections	291	273	283	295	1142	333	317	322		972
Coccidioidomycosis	37	28	69	123	261	38	53	72		163
Cryptosporidiosis	4	0	4	1	9	0	2	3		5
E. Coli	2	1	2	11	16	4	4	4		12
Giardiasis	5	1	4	2	12	2	3	4		9
Gonorrhea	53	59	54	65	231	57	35	34		126
Hepatitis A	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	0		1
Hepatitis B (Chronic)	6	11	8	1	26	14	8	8		30
Hepatitis C (Community)	68	65	61	57	251	67	69	67		203
Hepatitis C (Correctional)	39	33	26	40	138	21	30	23		74
Lyme Disease	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	1		2
Measles (Rubeola)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0		2
Meningitis (Bacterial)	1	0	1	2	4	3	3	2		8
Meningitis (Viral)	4	3	4	2	13	0	4	5		9
MRSA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Pertussis	8	12	5	2	27	4	4	3		11
Rubella	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0
Salmonellosis	8	7	10	17	42	6	9	8		23
Shigellosis	1	0	1	0	2	1	1	1		3
Syphilis (Primary/Secondary)	4	3	6	5	18	4	6	3		13
Tuberculosis	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	2		3

For more information, please visit the SLO County Epidemiology Data and Publications website. Case counts reflect those reported diseases that meet case definitions as established by the California Department of Public Health. Cases reported by health care providers that do not meet the case definitions are not included in case counts. All cases are for SLO County residents only. Persons who do not list SLO County as their primary residence and are reported as having a communicable disease are reported in their primary county of residence. Case counts may change over time, as cases currently under investigation are resolved they are added to the totals.



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PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
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93442

Email us at SLOpublichealth@co.slo.ca.us to subscribe, unsubscribe, or send us your feedback.

WHAT'S NEW AT PUBLIC HEALTH?

County residents who drink water from private wells are now better equipped to make sure their water stays safe, thanks to resources in an award-winning program from the Environmental Health Services division. California's extended drought caused lower ground water levels, which can have a negative impact on water quality. In response, the Environmental Health team developed resources ranging from a GIS map of groundwater basins for well drillers to a YouTube tutorial for well owners. Materials distill the complexities of hydrogeology into clear steps focused on safe water. The program was awarded the 100 Brilliant Ideas at Work Award from the National Association of Counties.

Emerging issues in tobacco control—such as tobacco's harmful effects on the environment and the growing threat of e-cigarettes—are in focus for the Tobacco Control Program's continued community outreach. Health Educator Nasseem Rouhani is supporting Morro Bay leaders in updating secondhand smoke policies to include e-cigarettes, a particular threat to youth health. Health Educators Jenelle Merzon and Ashley Allen are collaborating with Cuesta Community College leaders in their efforts to become a tobacco-free campus. Health Educator Grace Calhoun is continuing to spearhead evidence-based tobacco cessation programming, including free weekly Quit Smoking classes in four County locations. Know someone who is ready to quit? Visit www.slocounty.ca.gov/quit-tobacco for class details.

Flu shots and pandemic preparedness went hand-in-hand at the First Responder Point-of-Distribution Exercise organized by the Public Health Emergency Preparedness team, when more than 1,000 vaccines were given in three hours at four SLO County locations. The exercise provides flu shots to first responders plus County and city employees, while serving as a mass vaccination drill that helps teams stay ready to respond to the threat of pandemic illness.

The first-of-its-kind SLO Co. Infectious Disease Forum hosted by Public Health Lab Director Dr. Jim Beebe brought together physicians, microbiologists, lab managers, infection preventionists and Public Health staff to discuss the rapidly changing world of infectious disease laboratory technology. Topics included use of whole genome sequencing (WGS) for the identification and characterization of microbes, the effect of culture-independent tests and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) panels on diagnosis and communicable disease control, and new methods for detecting emerging infections.

The County of San Luis Obispo Health Commission is currently recruiting. The commission serves as an advisory board to the County Board of Supervisors and the Public Health Department on matters relating to health in SLO County. For more information or an application, call Jean White at 805-781-5520, email jwhite@co.slo.ca.us, or visit www.slocounty.ca.gov/health-commission. ■