

# BULLETIN

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

## IN THIS ISSUE

SUPPORTING BRAIN HEALTH AS WE AGE IN SLO COUNTY ..... 1

DATA SPOTLIGHT: AGE DEMOGRAPHICS ..... 2

HELPING PATIENTS QUIT INCREASINGLY HIGH LEVELS OF NICOTINE ..... 3

QUICK REFERENCE: PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING CONTACTS ..... 4

BEHIND THE NUMBERS: VALLEY FEVER ..... 5

REPORTED CASES OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES ..... 5

NEW AT PUBLIC HEALTH ..... 6



## HEALTH OFFICER NOTES

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



### SUPPORTING BRAIN HEALTH AS WE AGE IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

As many healthcare professionals in our community are aware, our population in SLO County is older than average for our state and our nation, and is trending toward increasing age.

The opportunity to grow old is shaped in many ways by our public health and healthcare systems and I applaud all those whose work over the years has helped our community members live longer lives. I also want to recognize those working today across many sectors to increase our knowledge and skill in serving our aging population and striving to ensure we all have needed services as we get older.

Our healthcare community is crucial in not only in caring for and referring patients facing dementia but in helping patients take steps to protect themselves from dementia. We've found adults of all ages are receptive to these conversations and grateful for the information—many are unaware that dementia is in part preventable.

The Alzheimer's Association reports that nearly 7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, a number projected to rise to nearly 14 million by 2060. In SLO County, residents experiencing dementia are expected to

increase by 128% from 2019 to 2040, with a 258% increase among our Latino residents.

This projected growth represents a significant challenge, yet research indicates that approximately 40% of dementia cases may be preventable through modifiable risk factors. Encouraging patients to adopt these evidence-based health measures can significantly reduce their risk of Alzheimer's and other dementias:

**Cardiovascular Health:** Manage hypertension, diabetes, and cholesterol. The evidence is clear that what benefits the heart also benefits the brain.

**Physical Activity:** Encourage regular exercise, which has been shown to reduce dementia risk by 30-40% in some studies. We've heard firsthand that some community members are intimidated by the word "exercise." As one of our County health educators has put it: "You just need to MOVE more." Recent research suggests that even two-minute increments of moderate-to high-intensity activity can positively impact health.

**Cognitive Stimulation:** Promote lifelong learning, social engagement, and mentally challenging activities.

**Healthy Diet:** Recommend eating habits rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats, while limiting processed foods and sugars.

**Sleep Quality:** Address sleep disorders and promote good sleep hygiene, as poor sleep is associated with increased cognitive decline.

**Substance Use:** Support smoking cessation and recommend limiting alcohol consumption.

**Head Injury Prevention:** Discuss protective measures including fall prevention, particularly with older adults.

Early detection is equally important. I encourage you to consider implementing brief cognitive assessments during wellness visits for patients 65 and older, and be attentive to concerns from family members.

Resources available to your patients include our Dementia Resource Guide, which provides information on local support services at [slocounty.gov/dementia-resource-guide](https://slocounty.gov/dementia-resource-guide). The Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast also provides valuable services to patients and caregivers, including their 24/7 Helpline at 800-272-3900.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the County Master Plan on Aging developed by our colleagues in the Department of Social Services and recently adopted by our Board of Supervisors. The plan presents a strategic roadmap to improve the well-being of older adults, adults living with disabilities, and their families, friends, and caregivers. It outlines key priorities to support our community, especially our rural, coastal, migrant, and monolingual residents: housing, healthcare, emotional well-being, and caregiving. You can review the full plan at [slocounty.gov/LADAP](https://slocounty.gov/LADAP).

Thank you for your attention—



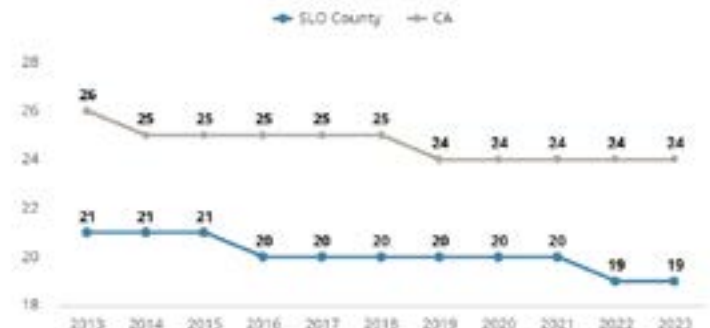
## DATA SPOTLIGHT: SLO COUNTY AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

Percent of the population age 65 and older



*SLO County has a larger percentage of those 65 years of age and older compared to the state of California.*

Percent of the population under age 18



*SLO County has a smaller percentage of those 18 years of age and younger, and that percent has been declining.*

# HELPING PATIENTS QUIT INCREASINGLY HIGH LEVELS OF NICOTINE

Nationally and locally, youth and adults are dependent on increasingly high levels of nicotine found in the latest types of tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices (vapes) and nicotine pouches.

Evidence is clear that for patients with moderate to severe nicotine dependence, the most effective route to quitting includes both behavioral support (Kick It CA) and/or either nicotine replacement therapy (gum, patch, lozenge, nasal spray) or prescription medication (Bupropion, Varenicline). Both nicotine replacement therapy and medication are usually covered by insurance, including Medi-Cal, when prescribed by a provider.

Our tobacco control team has launched a public education campaign informed by local adults with nicotine dependence, encouraging patients to talk with their healthcare provider about their desire to quit nicotine and the options available to help them.

How you can help your patients quit nicotine:

**Connect patients with free quit support through Kick It California.** Find information and resources specific for clinicians at [kickitca.org/health-professionals](http://kickitca.org/health-professionals).

**Prescribe quit medication.** See Pharmacologic Product Guide at [slocounty.gov/quit-medication](http://slocounty.gov/quit-medication).

Visit [www.slocounty.gov/clinician-resources-nicotine](http://www.slocounty.gov/clinician-resources-nicotine) for resources to support your practice:

- Ask, Advise, Refer Intervention Guide
- Ask-Council-Treat Guide for Youth
- How to Submit a Web Referral to Kick It California
- It's Time to Ask About Vaping Flyer
- Medi-Cal Coverage: Tobacco Cessation Medications Factsheet
- Nicotine Replacement Therapy and Adolescent Patients: Information for Pediatricians
- Steps to Take for Providers: Treat Tobacco Cessation

Our team can also provide posters and rack cards for your waiting room that encourage patients to ask their provider for help with quitting.

The tobacco control team is here to support providers to empower their patients to quit nicotine. Call 805-781-5540 or email [tobaccofree@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:tobaccofree@co.slo.ca.us) for additional educational materials.

## Trying to quit? You can start with 4 steps



**Step 1:** Ask your doctor about quit medication options.



**Step 2:** Fill your prescription at your pharmacy.



**Step 3:** Use prescription as directed by your doctor.



**Step 4:** Contact Kick It CA for help with quitting.

### Quit Medicines

#### Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT):

- Nicotine gum
- Nicotine patches
- Nicotine lozenges
- Nicotine nasal spray (by prescription)

#### Prescriptions (Rx):

- Bupropion (*Wellbutrin*)
- Varenicline (*Chantix*)



Scan the QR code for more information, or visit [slocounty.gov/quit](http://slocounty.gov/quit)



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*SLO County adults with nicotine dependence reported this card (above) was helpful in their effort to quit. Please contact our team if you would like no-cost copies for your practice.*

# Public Health Nursing

## Supports the healthcare community

"As healthcare systems adapt to new challenges, our Public Health Nurses remain your trusted partners. We bring compassion, clinical expertise, and strong community connection to our work with you in supporting vulnerable populations. Every consultation, referral, and coordination effort helps strengthen a system of care that reaches those who need it most. As nurses, we are honored to collaborate with you in advancing our shared mission to protect and promote health in San Luis Obispo County."

- Sarah Lack, Director of Nursing, Maternal and Child Health



### TO REPORT

- Animal bites | 805-781-4400
- Disease outbreaks | 805-781-5500
- Cases of Hepatitis C | 805-781-5500
- Possible cases of perinatal Hepatitis B | 805-781-5500



### TO REFER PATIENTS

- For vaccines | 805-781-5500
- For nurse home visiting | 805-788-2068
- For Enhanced Care Management (Medi-Cal patients) | 805-781-4838
- To SART (Suspected Abuse Response Team) | 805-781-4878



### FOR GUIDANCE

- Questions on tuberculosis (TB) | 805-781-5500
- Treatment for syphilis, including congenital syphilis | 805-781-5576
- Vaccines for international travel | 805-781-5500



### TO CONNECT

- With our Maternal and Child Health team (OB liaison) | 805-788-2068





# BEHIND THE NUMBERS: VALLEY FEVER

More San Luis Obispo County residents were diagnosed with Valley fever in 2024 than any previous year on record, with 485 cases reported to the Public Health Department during the calendar year. This is nearly double the 244 cases reported in 2023 and greater than the previous highest count of 445 cases in 2017.

This increase is not unexpected, as Valley fever is known to rise after periods of drought followed by heavy rain. The fungus that causes Valley fever, coccidioides, lives naturally in the soil in SLO County, neighboring counties, the Central Valley region, and other parts of the southwest. When soil is disturbed—by wind, digging, driving, or other causes—people can breathe in dust that contains spores from this fungus, leading to infection.

In this context, Valley fever testing is strongly recommended for patients who experience flu-like symptoms such as fever or cough for more than a week. Individuals at increased risk of developing severe Valley fever include older adults and those who are pregnant, have diabetes, or have conditions that weaken their immune system.

You can learn more at [slocounty.gov/valleyfever](https://slocounty.gov/valleyfever) or by calling the Public Health Department at 805-781-5500. Other detailed resources include the California Department of Public Health and the Valley Fever Center for Excellence at the University of Arizona. ■

## REPORTED CASES OF SELECTED COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

DISEASE	YEAR 2024					YEAR 2025				
	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Total Cases	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Year to Date
AIDS	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	<5	0		6
Campylobacteriosis	22	29	16	19	86	13	24	31		68
Chlamydia	186	148	174	139	647	168	226	180		574
Coccidioidomycosis	105	70	116	194	485	106	70	60		236
Cryptosporidiosis	<5	<5	<5	<5	8	0	<5	<5		6
E. Coli	<5	<5	13	6	26	7	<5	5		12+
Giardiasis	6	7	<5	5	18+	5	<5	<5		11
Gonorrhea	37	42	54	40	173	35	29	34		98
Hepatitis B	5	7	<5	6	18+	<5	<5	<5		6
Hepatitis C (Community)	13	16	17	10	56	13	12	5		30
Hepatitis C (Correctional)	8	13	5	5	31	5	8	7		20
HIV	<5	<5	<5	<5	13	0	<5	0		<5
Legionellosis	<5	<5	<5	7	14	5	<5	<5		11
Meningitis	<5	<5	<5	0	6	<5	<5	<5		9
Pertussis	<5	0	<5	12	16	8	9	<5		17+
Salmonellosis	6	16	19	10	51	5	<5	10		15+
Shigellosis	7	<5	<5	<5	15	0	<5	<5		8
Syphilis Primary/Secondary	6	8	9	7	30	<5	<5	<5		7
Syphilis Latent	7	17	16	9	49	8	10	<5		18+
Syphilis (Other)	9	8	<5	8	25+	9	<5	<5		17
Tuberculosis (Active)	<5	0	0	<5	<5	<5	<5	0		<5
Tuberculosis (Latent)	12	37	33	25	107	45	45	30		120
Vibriosis	<5	<5	<5	<5	5	0	<5	<5		<5

Case counts may change over time as a result of de-duplication efforts, case follow-up ending, and/or as a result of historical tests or retroactive findings. All cases are for San Luis Obispo County residents only. For more information, please visit [slocounty.ca.gov/epidemiology](https://slocounty.ca.gov/epidemiology).  
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## WHAT'S NEW AT PUBLIC HEALTH?

**COVID-19 and flu vaccines are now widely available at pharmacies and Public Health Clinics.**

State officials recommend that anyone who wants the COVID-19 vaccine be able to receive it, despite recent FDA licensure changes. Assembly Bill 144 ensures recommended vaccines remain covered by California-regulated insurers, including Medi-Cal. Public Health Clinics can vaccinate ages 6 months and older, including off-label use under current FDA licensure. Learn more at [slocounty.gov/covidvaccine2025](https://slocounty.gov/covidvaccine2025) or call 805-781-5500.

**Due to County budget cuts, the Grover Beach Public Health Clinic, four of seven WIC clinics, and our Healthy Aging and Reproductive Health programs ended July 1, 2025.** We have worked to connect clients with services to ensure continuity of care. To learn more, including alternative care, please visit [slocounty.gov/ContinueCare](https://slocounty.gov/ContinueCare).

**On the latest episode of Healthy Voices**, experts at the County of SLO Behavioral Health Department share tips for nurturing your mental health, signs a child may be struggling with their mental health, what you can do to help, and where to find support. Call 1-800-838-1381 or visit [slobehavioralhealth.org](https://slobehavioralhealth.org) to learn more about the Behavioral Health Clinics.



Need crisis support? Call the Central Coast Hotline at 1-800-783-0607. Plus, watch and share the episode with patients in Spanish, Mixteco, and English at [bit.ly/healthyvoices](https://bit.ly/healthyvoices).

**Mobile clinic vans from the SLO Noor Foundation and CAPSLO's The Center for Health and Prevention are bringing care on the road.** Call The Center at 805-544-2478 or SLO Noor at 805-439-1797, or see their updated schedules on social media. These mobile clinics mostly care for underserved or low-income community members who are not getting health care in a traditional clinic. Support for these clinics was provided by the County's Public Health Impacts funding from the American Rescue Plan Act which aims to address critical community health improvement needs, like access to care. ■