




Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Middle-Brook Regional
Health Commission**

YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S

COMMUNITY REPORT 2024

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Message from the Health Officer, Director of MBRHC

The first quarter of 2025 has brought unprecedented challenges to the public health community, such as pushbacks against longstanding science and fact-based knowledge, measles outbreaks and exposures, concerns about the spread of avian influenza (H5N1), and cutbacks in funding and resources that are used to save lives and protect our communities. We have experienced many of these challenges in the past or similar ones and have always managed to deal with them, however, they historically do not all happen at once and so times are tough.

While we contend with these many threats to our communities' health and well-being, we still want to take the time to highlight and demonstrate the efforts and value of public health, the health department, and all our partners. Following is our 2024 Report to the Community which provides a snapshot of our efforts and accomplishments over the past year to improve the health of our communities. The report, presented around The Foundational Public Health Services, is designed to explain to you the work we do and why we do it. In this report you will experience the work of the Health Commission's disease prevention, health promotion, environmental health, and support staff. You will see that we investigated over 800 reported infectious diseases, including common, rare, emerging, and re-emerging diseases. We tracked, investigated, and provided guidance for 28 facility-based outbreaks of disease threatening our most vulnerable populations. Our staff assisted in educating these facilities as well as providing programs on chronic disease prevention, such as cancer prevention, diet and nutrition. You will witness the efforts of the environmental health specialists who conducted 100s of restaurant inspections to protect the food you eat as well as pool, camp, school, massage and other facility inspections to protect the public. All this while working with partners to provide clinical services, keeping the public aware of current events and actions to take to protect against disease, prevent injury and illness, and promote healthy behaviors. We are a small, but mighty (and busy) team working to protect you at all times.

I hope that this report tells our story and paints a picture for you of the Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission, its staff, and the work they perform on your behalf. As always, I welcome your comments and feedback, both positive and constructive. If you have any thoughts on this report, the work we do, or the work you think we should be doing, let me know!

Wishing You Good Health and Well-Being,



Kevin G. Sumner, MPH

Health Officer/Director

Table of Contents

04 **About the Commission**

06 **Public Health Overview**

07 **Foundational Areas**

15 **Foundational Capabilities**

19 **Feedback Survey**

Our Approach to

Prevention, Promotion, & Protection

Our Mission:

To improve the health of our community and environment through the use of prevention services, health promotion and protection strategies.

Our Vision:

Healthy People and Places – A Healthy Community

Our Members:

The Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission was formed in 1970, serving the towns of Bound Brook, Green Brook, Middlesex and South Bound Book. In 1971, the town of Watchung joined the Commission and several years later, Warren was included in the region served. Towns currently served are Bridgewater, Green Brook, Warren and Watchung.

The Commission's governing body consists of two volunteer representatives from each of the towns served, and provides direction and long-term planning for the Commission's overall activities. These volunteer representatives bring with them a broad range of personal and professional abilities and expertise to serve in this capacity, and we are most appreciative of the time and energy they so willingly donate. The list of Commission members who currently serve in 2025 is shown below.

Community members are always welcome to attend Commission Meetings, to either bring concerns to the attention of members, or to simply learn more about local public health activities! Meeting information is available on our website: www.middlebrookhealth.org

Bridgewater	Green Brook	Warren	Watchung
Howard Norgalis Timothy Ring	Atul Shah Lisa Couch Bob Longo	Greg Riley Angela Valerio Mal Plager	Robert Riedinger Bruce Ruck Marybeth Lijo

Officers: President: Greg Riley, Vice President: Angela Valerio, Treasurer: Timothy Ring

Our Staff:

The Middle-Brook Regional Health Commission is:

- **State Licensed Health Officer** who manages and leads the Commission. Who provides the vision for the agency and the oversight for all activities of the Commission;
- **Administrative Staff** who answer calls, respond to questions, manage Commission records. This staff serves as Registrars of Vital Statistics and licensing agents for the Townships of Green Brook and Warren;
- **Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) and Senior Registered Environmental Health Specialist** who collectively conduct all restaurant inspections, and the inspections of kennels, massage therapy establishments, recreational bathing places, body art shops and daycare providers. They investigate and follow-up on public health complaints, review plans, facilitate public clinics, and investigate reportable communicable diseases;
- **Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES)** who is responsible for bringing public health awareness to the community and educating community members on healthy living through wellness programs;
- **Local Health Outreach Coordinator** who is responsible for identifying the needs of at-risk populations and connecting them with the services that are available to help them;
- **Infectious Disease Preparedness Generalist** who is responsible for disease surveillance, disease investigations, and outbreak management for the childcare centers, long term care and other facilities;
- **Governing individuals of the local Boards of Health** who act as the public's eyes and ears, and provide the policies and plans for MBRHC;
- **Its numerous partners**, including municipal, county and state public health organizations, and the not-for profit and for-profit entities that provide public health services, and
- **The individuals and residents** who are served and who assist MBRHC throughout the year.

You can find our staff contact information at www.middlebrookhealth.org/contact-us.

What is Public Health?



Public Health promotes and protects the health of all individuals and the communities where they live, work, and play.

To the left, you will see the 10 Essential Public Health Services framework recognized for carrying out the mission of public health. This model represents a cyclic process of assessment, policy development and assurance; which allows for continuous improvement and adaptation to ever evolving community needs .

As a Regional Health Commission which provides governmental public health services at the local level, The Foundational Public Health Services framework illustrates our core responsibilities to ensure adequate community protection, disease prevention, and health promotion. Below you will find the framework:

Foundational Areas are the topic-focused programs public health agencies provide.

Foundational Capabilities are the infrastructure for public health professionals.

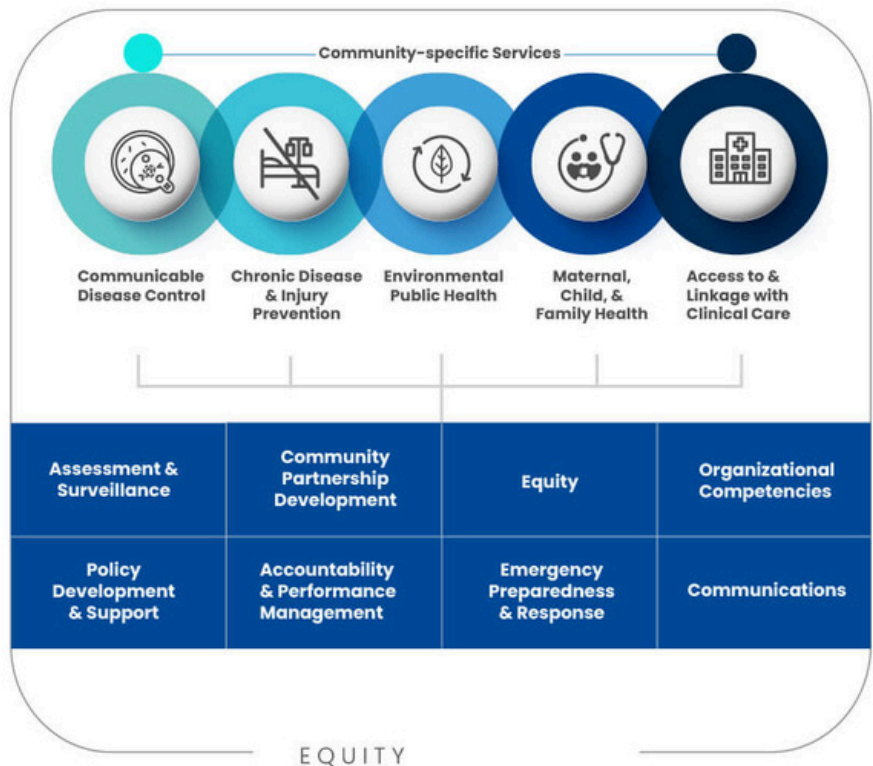


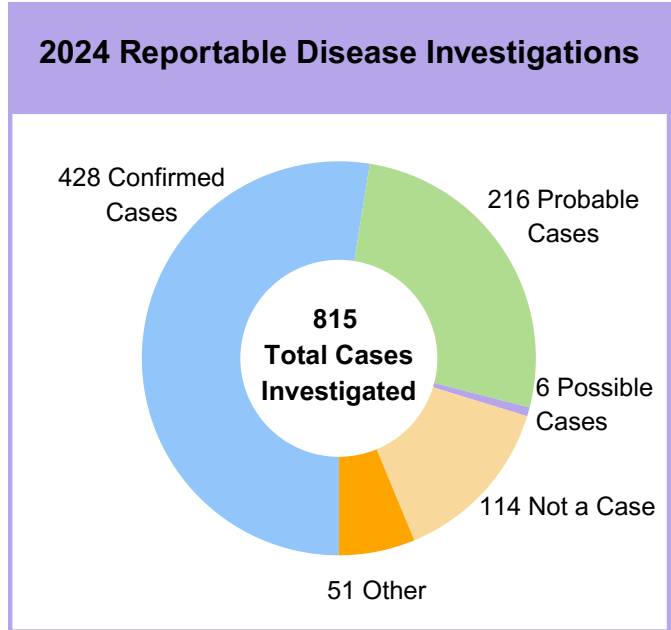
Image Source: PHAB, 2022.

Through the foundation of public health infrastructure and community-specific programs, our services work to address the needs of all individuals to provide opportunity for all to achieve healthy lives.



Communicable Disease Control

Our Infectious Disease Preparedness Generalist investigated a total of 815 cases in 2024. The graphic to the right illustrates the classification of each case confirmed, probable, possible, not a case or other. The “other” category represents cases that did not require follow-up, out of our jurisdiction, or still under investigation. The Commission examines each case and determines the status of the illness through lab report analysis, patient interviews, and State guidance.



A reportable disease is an infectious disease that requires an investigation in order to understand the origin, identify if there were any additional exposures, and to provide guidance to limit spread of the disease.

As a method to protect public health and understand the burden of disease at a local level, we monitor, investigate, and respond to certain diseases and conditions. Below you will find diseases to note from 2024:

Most Common Disease Investigations

- Influenza, (respiratory illness)
- Lyme Disease, (vector-borne disease)
- Campylobacter (food-borne illness)

Diseases on the Rise

- Pertussis
- Travel related illnesses
- Vector-borne diseases

Chronic Disease Investigations

- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C

Rare Disease Investigations


- Alpha-Gal Syndrome
- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Legionellosis
- Malaria
- Pertussis
- Giardiasis

2024 Outbreak Investigations		
Town	Number	Type of Facility
Bridgewater	20	Long Term Care
	1	Daycare
Green Brook	1	Long Term Care
Warren	4	Long Term Care
Watchung	2	Long Term Care
Commission Total	28	

We work closely with our long-term care facilities, childcare facilities, and schools to monitor for and respond to infectious disease outbreaks in these settings. In 2024, the MBRHC investigated 28 outbreaks. Outbreak investigations help us understand why a disease is spreading and how we can provide guidance to prevent further exposure or illnesses from occurring especially since young children, those with other illnesses, and older adults are more at risk for serious health complications. Types of disease outbreaks investigated in 2024 include COVID, Flu, RSV, Streptococcus, and Gastroenteritis.

2024 Project Firstline

Project Firstline is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative. The collaboration provides evidence-based infection control and prevention training to Long-Term Care Facilities & Skilled Nursing Facilities frontline healthcare workers. The training consists of methods to prevent spread of disease to those most at risk of severe health outcomes in an environment intended for healing. In 2024, we expanded our trainings from infection prevention and control basics to include Norovirus prevention and environmental cleaning and disinfection. Below are program highlights:



5 Infection Control and Prevention Trainings

- 1 Basic IP and Control
- 3 Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection
- 1 Say No to Norovirus

96%

OF PARTICIPANTS report that their understanding of the topic improved after the training.

98%

OF PARTICIPANTS report that they will use the knowledge gained from the training in their everyday work.

110

Frontline Healthcare personnel trained.



Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention




2024 Health Education Programs				
Type	Cancer Prevention	Nutrition	MBRHC	Total
Number of Program	3	3	1	7
Number of Participants	67	34	37	138

In 2024, our Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) coordinated seven Health Education programs, on topics such as cancer prevention, promotion of healthy behaviors, and an overview of what services we provide. These programs were developed by subject

matter experts in cancer control, nutrition, and public health. We implemented these programs at our libraries, senior centers or senior club meetings, community events and even virtually! Our goal was to conveniently provide these initiatives. Below and on the following page you will find program impact and outcomes:

Collaborating for Cancer Awareness

We partnered with Cancer Control Specialists at Rutgers Cancer Institute to enhance public awareness of various cancers, including breast, colorectal, and lung. Our efforts focused on:

-  **Understanding Cancer:** teaching a basic overview of what it is and how it develops.
-  **Risk Factors & Prevention:** highlighting key risk factors while promoting lifestyle choices that reduce cancer.
-  **Screening & Early Detection:** providing evidence-based resources on screening guidelines and early detection strategies.

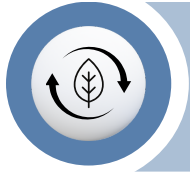
Empowering Healthier Eating Habits

We partnered with Registered Dietitian Nutritionists from Nourish and Thrive Nutrition Center to provide live cooking demos while delivering engaging, evidence-based nutrition education. Upon completion of the session, program participants reported:

- An increase in participants knowledge, skill, and confidence in their ability to identify healthier food (100%)
- An increase in participants knowledge, skill and confidence in their ability to select, shop for and prepare dishes (97%)
- A commitment from the participants to shop for and prepare food discussed in the presentation (100%)

In 2024, in partnership with the Community Visiting Nurses Association, we held 11 blood pressure clinics. In addition to blood pressure screening, the program also provided high blood pressure and nutrition counseling, medication education, as well as made referrals for participants to follow-up as necessary. Blood pressure screenings are an early detection method of high blood pressure or hypertension. See overview of screenings below:

2024 Blood Pressure Screenings		
Location	Number of Screenings	Total Participants
Warren Senior Center	3	29
Centerbridge I	2	22
Centerbridge II	2	23
Bridgewater Senior Center	4	72
Commission Total	11	146



Environmental Public Health

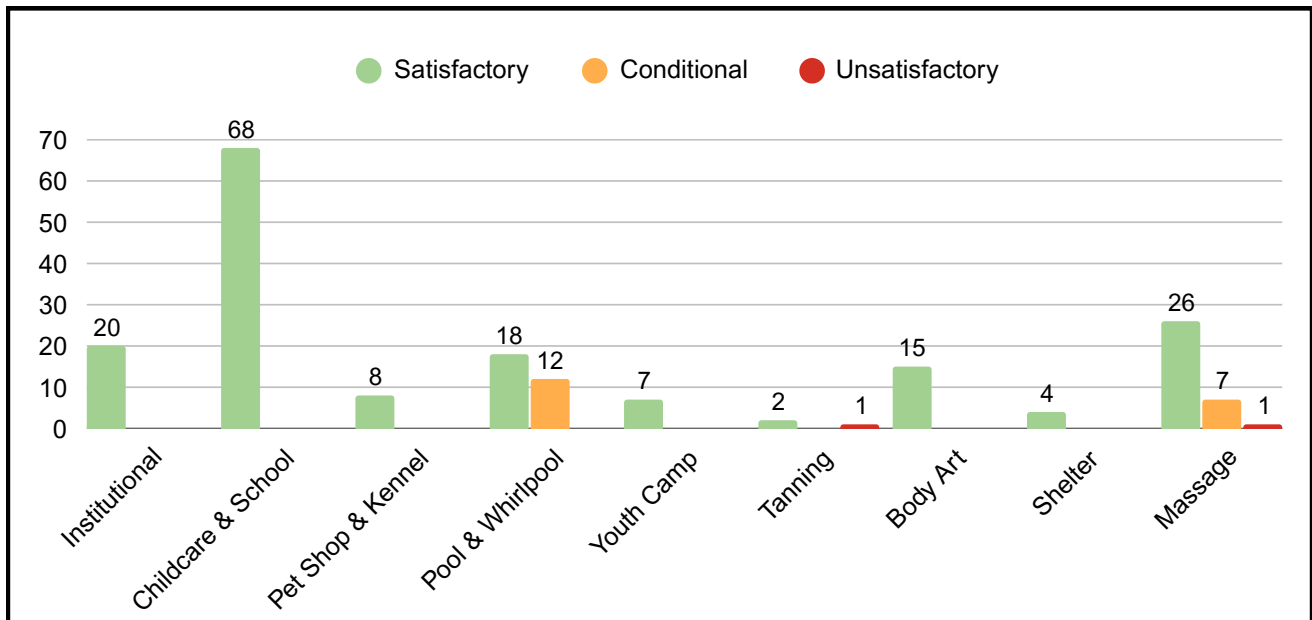
Environmental Public Health encompasses all aspects of the natural and built environment affecting human health. While Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS or health inspectors) are commonly known for conducting annual restaurant inspections, their responsibilities extend far beyond this single task.

2024 Retail Food Inspections				
Town	Sat.	Cond.	Unsat.	Total
Bridgewater	237	7	0	244
Green Brook	48	9	0	57
Warren	76	6	0	82
Watchung	54	3	0	57
MBRHC Total	415	25	0	440

*Sat. = Satisfactory, Cond. = Conditional, Unsat. =Unsatisfactory

The table on the top right of the page shows the inspection outcomes of retail food establishments in our jurisdictions from 2024.

Health Inspectors also perform inspections for our temporary mobile food events, institutional facilities, childcare centers, schools, pet shops, kennels, youth camps, tanning facilities, body art settings, shelters, and massage locations. Health inspections play a crucial role in preventing disease by ensuring that establishments and facilities adhere to health and safety regulations. Below is a graph representing the Commission’s inspections of Licensed Facilities:



Compliance with local rules and regulations contributes to the prevention of outbreaks of food borne illnesses, waterborne diseases, and other communicable diseases that could otherwise spread within the community. All Commission inspection reports can be accessed on our website.

2024 Environmental Health Responses					
Town	Septic	Well	Animal Incidents	Complaints	Total
Bridgewater	19	10	43	39	111
Green Brook	5	3	19	23	50
Warren	23	29	31	104	187
Watchung	44	10	18	16	88
MBRHC Total	91	52	111	182	436

Outside of annual facility inspections, REHS also monitor and assess a wide range of issues, including animal bites, solid waste, septic systems, well water quality, lead cases, and environmental nuisances. Responding to environmental nuisances often involves regulatory intervention, enforcement actions, and education to mitigate risks and ensure healthy and safe living conditions in our community. The table above shows how many and what type of incidents our health inspectors responded to in 2024. Complaints include a variety of reports that warrant follow-up for public health assurance.

In June of 2024, our REHS and Health Educator provided an educational session on food safety and proper handling for the food vendors participating in the Somerset County 4-H Fair following several issues identified during the 2023 inspections. As a result of the presentation, 2024 inspections showed major improvements—vendors were well-prepared with correct equipment, proper food handling, and effective setups. Although severe weather limited the fair to just one public day, vendors demonstrated excellent readiness and compliance throughout. This ensures safe food practices and prevents the spread of food-borne illness.

In 2024, the Commission held 4 rabies vaccination clinics. To the right, you will find a table showing how vaccines were administered. Access to free rabies vaccinations for dog and cat owners is essential for rabies exposure prevention and control. The vaccines are funded by the state meaning that our rabies clinics are open to any NJ resident.

2024 Rabies Vaccination Clinics			
Clinic Location	Dogs Vaccinated	Cats Vaccinated	Total
Bridgewater	69	17	86
Green Brook	44	9	53
Warren	36	13	49
Watchung	49	11	60
MBRHC Total	198	50	248



Maternal Child and Family Health

2024 Child Health Services

- 6 Number of Child Health Clinics
- 21 Total Participants
- 33 Vaccines Administered
- 5 Physical Exams

We partner with the Community Visiting Nurse Association to provide adult and child health services for those uninsured or underinsured. Adult health services include blood pressure screenings, annual vaccine clinics support, and more. Child health services include childhood immunizations, well-baby checkups, lead screening, growth and development assessment, nutrition counseling and physicals.

Above you will see an overview of child health services provided in 2024. The 2024 blood pressure screening overview can be found in the Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention section on page 10.

In 2024, a total of 52 school and childcare facilities were audited for Immunization Compliance. The purpose of immunization audits in schools is to ensure that students meet the required vaccination standards to protect public health. These audits verify compliance with New Jersey immunization laws, helping to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases within childcare facilities and school systems. Additionally, immunization audits identify any gaps in vaccination coverage, allowing schools and local public health to address noncompliance and promote a safer, healthier environment for all students. Last year, overall the immunization compliance rate was 96.7 % in our jurisdiction, see below for more information:

High Schools, Middle Schools & Elementary Schools Immunization

- 26 Schools Audited
- 2556 Immunization Records Reviewed
- 94.5% Immunization Compliance Rate (82-100% range)

Preschools & Childcare Immunization

- 26 Preschools & Childcare Audited
- 2673 Immunization Records Reviewed
- 98.6% Immunization Compliance Rate (69-100% range)



Access to & Linkage with Clinical Care

In 2024, we held 4 community vaccination clinics. These clinics offer the opportunity for our residents to get their Flu and COVID vaccines. Our clinics are run in partnership with the Community Visiting Nurse Association (CVNA) and Green Brook Family Medicine. Below is an overview of participation:

2024 Vaccination Clinics				
Town	Number of Clinics	Number of Vaccinations		Total
		Flu	COVID	
Bridgewater	2	62	32	94
Warren	2	131	62	193
Commission Total	4	193	94	287

Additionally, we were able to provide vaccinations to protect individuals who are homebound through our outreach and CVNA services.

In 2024, Warren Township, in collaboration with us, offered (and continues to offer) CredibleMind. CredibleMind is an online, confidential, scientifically vetted, platform designed to assist residents with their mental health. Residents of Warren have access to this online platform 24/7.

2024 Bridgewater Health & Wellness Fairs

The staff from the CVNA and the Commission participated in the Spring and Fall Health Fairs held at the Bridgewater Township Senior Center.

With CredibleMind, residents of Warren had access to programs to learn new skills, to understand one’s own mental health, to assess one’s own mental health, and to browse thousands of mental wellbeing resources and local behavioral health services. Some topics provided includes:

- Stress
- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Relationships
- Mindfulness
- Resilience
- Time-Management
- Happiness
- Sleep
- Parenting
- Grief and Loss
- Flourishing
- Substance Use
- Aging



Assessment and Surveillance

Our administrative staff serve as Registrars of Vital Statistics and licensing agents for Green Brook and Warren. To the right you will find a count of our Vital Statistics in 2024. Required by law, this data is collected and documented in municipalities through each community's Office of Vital Statistics (often

Vital Statistics				
Town	Marriage Licenses Issued	Certified Copies	Birth & Death Reports	Total
Green Brook	51	48	50	149
Warren	257	467	139	863
Total	308	515	189	1012

housed in public health offices), and is submitted to the New Jersey Office of Vital Statistics, at the New Jersey Department of Health. This data has been crucial in providing a picture of a community's health status, by providing statistics on the number of births and deaths, causes of death, data on race, ethnicity and social (marital partner) status.

Healthier Somerset

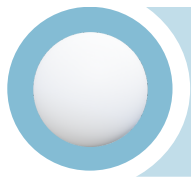
Our Health Officer participated on the 2024 CHNA-CHIP Advisory Committee which guided the development of the Somerset County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The purpose of the CHNA is to systematically identify the needs, strengths, and resources of the community to inform future planning; understand the current health status of the service area overall and its subpopulations within their social context; and engage the community to help determine the needs and opportunities for action.

Priority Areas for Improvement Planning

- Mental Health & Behavioral Health
- Food Insecurity & Healthy Eating
- Chronic Disease Prevention/ Management
- Access to Services

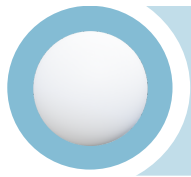
Through this comprehensive and iterative assessment process, major areas were identified as community need after the coalition gathered input from residents and stakeholders, feedback from the community health survey, and analyzing existing data such as the census.

The needs identified then informed coalition members to prioritize the four main areas for Community Health Improvement Planning (listed above). You can read more about the Somerset CHNA on rwjbh.org.



Policy Development & Support

In 2024, while working with the Board of Health we updated and amended a well water ordinance to bring it up to date with current safe drinking water standards. This local ordinance puts greater protections in place than state laws. The amendment made it more consistent with state and federal regulations, including adopting standards for new contaminants such as PFOAs (forever chemicals).



Organizational Competencies

Workforce Development

The Commission staff is dedicated to enhancing skills and staying current on best practices through annual trainings, continuing education, and attendance at Public Health Conferences. In 2024 Commission staff attended over 65 public health continuing education courses. Topics included communicable disease control, environmental health,

vital statistics, chronic disease prevention, tobacco control, cultural competency, health literacy, and more! Some of these training opportunities were attained at conferences. At the top right of the page you will find a list of conferences staff attended in 2024.

2024 Public Health Conference Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Jersey Environmental Health Association (NJEHA) Conference • National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) 360 Conference • Society for Public Health Education Advocacy Summit • North East Epidemiology Conference

Grants

The majority of resources to the Commission are provided by our member municipalities. In 2024, we received grants which support some staff and programs such as:

- **Enhancing Public Health**, which is a federal grant that supports staff and workforce development.
- **Sustaining Public Health and Strengthening Public Health**, which both supports staff.
- **Radon Grant**, which provides free radon test kits for residents.
- **Project Firstline** which supported infection prevention and control efforts.



Emergency Preparedness

The Commission is responsible for maintaining preparedness and response plans for events including natural or other disasters, communicable disease outbreaks, environmental emergencies, or other events which may be short- or long-term. In 2024, we reviewed, revised, and approved our continuity of operation plan (COOP). The purpose of a COOP is to ensure that the capability exists to continue the essential functions in a wide range of potential emergencies.

In the event of an emergency, we respond to and manage local incidents to safeguard public health. Last year we were notified of several afterhour incidents in food establishments, such as fires and chemical releases. In partnership with traditional emergency responders like police and fire personnel, the health department responds, inspects, and assures the establishment does not represent a potential hazard to the public or employees before we approve their re-opening.

2024 Public Health Advisories

- 2 Boil Water
- 3 Animal Preparedness
- 2 Recall Alerts
- 4 Communicable Disease
- 1 Heat

Additionally in 2024, we issued 12 Public Health Advisories to residents on a variety of topics to raise awareness and take action as needed. We work to publish and share this information through multiple communication channels such as our website, social media platforms, local boards of health, township administration, licensed facilities, and libraries.

We also prioritize community readiness by continually educating the public on the importance of personal preparedness. In 2024, we participated in 4 personal emergency preparedness outreach events providing resources and action steps for residents to plan for the unexpected.

Lastly, to enhance coordination at all levels of government—local, state, and federal—our Health Officer serves on the NACCHO Preparedness Policy Advisory Group, which meets monthly with federal officials. This group reviews preparedness policy proposals, advises NACCHO and federal agencies on local concerns, and provides guidance on preparedness strategies.



Community Partnership Development

Building and maintaining cross-sector, community partnerships in Local Public Health fosters a collaborative approach to address health challenges, to share reliable, relevant information and to reach at-risk populations or those who face barriers to accessing services that influence health outcomes. We value our community partnerships to enhance and support our public health initiatives for improving health outcomes and addressing systematic challenges. Below are many of the partners we worked with throughout 2024:

- Community Organizations
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Schools
- Libraries
- Healthcare Providers
- Emergency Responders
- Long-Term Care Facilities
- Senior Clubs & Centers
- New Jersey Departments of Health
- Other Local Health Departments
- Non-Governmental Agencies
- And More!



Communication

We are honored to provide trustworthy, comprehensive, and actionable information. To achieve this, we annually review update our communication plan which prioritizes clear, relevant, and timely public health updates.

In 2024 we released 15 newsletters with topics including emergency preparedness, chronic disease prevention, communicable disease prevention, food safety, mental health enhancement and more! We also stayed active on social platforms with a total of 276 posts on each platform. Below are website and social media outcomes from 2024:

Website Outcomes

10 K Total Website Views

2.6 K Active Users

77 Average Engagement Time (in seconds)

Social Media Outcomes

Application Platform	Individuals Reached	Number of Engagement	Engagement Percentage
Facebook	1900	279	15%
Instagram	428	102	24%
X (Twitter)	6612	177	3%
Total	8940	558	6%



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Health Commission**

Connect with us



(732) 968-5151



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middlebrookhealth.org



/mbrhc



@mbrhc_nj

Thank you for reading our 2024 Community Report!

We need your input, take our survey.



Your voice matters. Please take a minute to participate in our feedback survey by scanning the QR or visiting:
<https://bit.ly/MBRHC-Survey>.

To take the survey over the phone, call us Monday-Friday
8:30 AM - 4:00 PM at 732-968-5151.