



Board of Chosen Freeholders

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MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hunterdon County's Health Emergency Model Shared With NJ Health Commissioner During Visit

New Jersey's new Health Commissioner, Dr. Shereef Elnahal, held a roundtable discussion with Hunterdon County officials on August 9, and learned about the County's hybrid model of emergency preparedness programming between the Health Division and the Office of Emergency management, as well as other significant efforts for protecting the public's health in Hunterdon County.

Freeholder Suzanne Lagay, the Board's liaison for the Health Division, joined Department of Public Safety and Health Services Director George Wagner, Health Division Head and County Entomologist Tadhgh Rainey, County Health Officer Karen DeMarco, specialists in Public Health Nursing, Environmental Health, Health Education, Infectious Disease, and the Hazardous Materials Response and Emergency Management unit in a discussion of the wide scope of County health services with the Commissioner.

Freeholder Lagay stated, "We welcome Commissioner Elnahal's visit and his willingness to meet with County Health units throughout the state. It is refreshing to see Trenton reaching out to those on the front lines to gather information and develop a dialogue. The Hunterdon County Health team is a model of collaboration, enthusiasm, and professionalism. Our public is well served."

Ms. DeMarco reported to the Commissioner that, "Hunterdon County has developed a hybrid model of programming between the Health Division and the Office of Emergency management, which is unique to Hunterdon. This cross-discipline partnership has aided in robust Communicable Disease Control, Hazardous Materials Response, and Public Health and Emergency response planning, in general."

In a 2018 audit the County Health Division's emergency preparedness training and planning was labelled 'a model for public health preparedness in New Jersey,' by the State Department of Health (NJDOH) assessment auditor.

Ms. DeMarco added, "During the nationwide E. Coli outbreak this spring, Hunterdon County Division of Health was recognized by NJDOH as a key public health partner in detecting the outbreak and identifying the source as romaine lettuce. This is attributed to the astute and fast-acting staff members at the Health Division."

Mr. Rainey reported on various tick-borne diseases and public education and protection responses in the County, including "the discovery of rare tick species in North America, the Longhorned tick, which is a significant pest of livestock.

As a result, the County initiated eradication efforts utilizing our mosquito control staff. As of this time we have eliminated nearly all ticks from the property where the discovery was made."

Commissioner Elnahal's visit is as part of his effort to visit local health agencies to engage in meaningful dialogue about major programs and public health practice achievements, opportunities for high impact collaboration, and community health needs and concerns.

Following the meeting, Dr. Elnahal took to Twitter to reflect on the meeting, tweeting, "We will take many of their best practices in spreading awareness around tick-borne diseases (Lyme, Babesiosis), integrating health and emergency preparedness efforts, and more."

