

Utah health department launches public health YouTube series

HEALTH departments across the nation are turning to Twitter, Facebook and other social media tools to promote healthy behaviors in their communities. In Utah, the Salt Lake Valley Health Department's YouTube initiative is doing double duty as it not only offers important health information but also puts a face on the important work of public health professionals.

Visitors to the Salt Lake Valley Health Department's YouTube channel can choose from among a dozen videos on topics ranging from H1N1 influenza immunization to travel health to swimming pool hygiene. Included in the lineup is a new mini-series showcasing how health department employees work to protect the community's health each day. The Utah health agency created the episodes to "demystify what the health department does, show the challenges public health faces and put a human face on our agency," according to Public Information Specialist Kate Lilja, who oversees the Salt Lake Valley Health Department's social media initiatives.

"Having that human face makes us accessible, makes people know who we are and what we do and increases overall awareness of our programs and services," said Lilja, who is an APHA member. "A better understanding can lead to more accessing of our services if people

know what we offer, and a better understanding of the important role of public health in any community."

The pilot episode of the health professionals mini-series follows a pool inspector with the health department's Bureau of Water Quality and Hazardous Waste. The inspector shows county residents how the health department protects public health through water quality testing. Another episode follows an immunizations nurse at a local clinic. Lilja recently began working on a third episode that will focus on disease investigation and will follow the work of the health department's chief epidemiologist.

The YouTube initiative is an important component of the health department's public outreach efforts, Gary Edwards, MS, executive director of the Salt Lake Valley Health Department, told *The Nation's Health*.

"Telling our own stories through a YouTube series like 'Public Health Professionals' is an important part of this conversation," Edwards said. "Each episode introduces the viewer to our exemplary employees, highlighting what they do, why they do it, what challenges they face and — ultimately —

why they love their job."

The department's foray into social media began in early 2009 with a Twitter account. Facebook was soon added and YouTube joined the social media mix in April 2009 with a video created to promote the health department's One Small Change — For the Health of It campaign. The ongoing campaign encourages Salt Lake County residents to improve their health by making one small change in their lives. Two weeks after the campaign launched, the H1N1 epidemic hit and Lilja quickly

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turned her attention to creating videos tied to the emerging pandemic, such as a video that captured the efforts of the Salt Lake Valley Health Department's H1N1

vaccine appointment call center.

In the year since launching the health department's YouTube initiative, Lilja has upgraded to a more versatile video camera and also gained a journalism intern to help develop future videos designed to increase awareness of the diversity of work carried out by employees throughout the health department.

"We look for people who are willing to do this," Lilja said. "There are some people who just are uncomfortable in front of the camera."

Wellness Coordinator Meghan Lane felt comfortable enough to volunteer for the One Small Change — For the Health of It campaign video, which as of late February was outpacing all of the other videos in terms of views.

Lane said she enjoyed being part of the video, which shows her in a grocery store aisle choosing healthy cereal.

"This gives us more free rein to get the information out there," Lane said.

For more information on Salt Lake Valley's YouTube channel, visit www.slvhealth.org.

— Teddi Dineley Johnson

STATES IN BRIEF

Arizona tallies record rabies cases in 2009

Arizona health officials reported a record number of rabid animals in 2009, and they say there is no sign that the viral disease is waning.

In January, the Arizona Department of Health Services said 261 animals tested positive for rabies in 2009, which was 85 more than in the previous year. During the record-breaking 2009 year, two counties established quarantines, which was another first for the state.

"There is no sign of rabies letting up in many parts of the state," said Craig Levy, the state health department's vector-borne disease program manager. "As we head into 2010, we need to be prepared for more rabid wild animals and the exposures to people and pets that they bring."

In Arizona, the principal rabies hosts are bats, skunks and foxes. When rabies activity within those animal groups increases, rabies can spill over into other mammal species such as bobcats, coyotes, cats, dogs, horses and cows. In December 2009, Santa Cruz County issued a 60-day quarantine, similar to Coconino County's quarantine earlier in the year. Both quarantines ordered people to keep their dogs in their yards or on a short leash, bring dishes of pet food indoors at night and vaccinate all pets against rabies. The 2009 rabies cases were found among bats, skunks, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, horses, a cow and a cat.

The health department has worked with the Arizona Department of Game and Fish to educate the public about wild animals and rabies. They have advised people to avoid wild animals, especially those appearing to be sick, dead or behaving strangely, and to keep pets' vaccinations current.

In 2009, 47 people in Arizona were exposed to confirmed rabid animals. All the people were treated without developing rabies illness. Arizona's last recorded human rabies death occurred in 1981.

Cigarette tax increase beneficial for states

A recent report found that cigarette tax increases would raise billions of dollars for cash-strapped states while also reducing tobacco use and winning voter approval.

Released in February, the report found that if every state and Washington, D.C., raised cigarette taxes by \$1 a pack, the result would be about \$9 billion in new annual revenue. And the move would prevent more than 2.3 million kids from becoming smokers and prompt more than 1 million adult smokers to quit. Other results of a \$1-per-pack tax increase would be the prevention of 1 million premature, smoking-caused deaths and more than \$52 billion saved in health care costs.

"This report shows that raising tobacco taxes is truly a win-win for the states," said Matthew L. Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. "It is a budget win that will help protect vital programs like health care and education, a health win that will prevent kids from smoking and save lives, and a political win with the voters."

A national poll released with the report found 67 percent of voters supported a \$1 tobacco tax increase and preferred higher tobacco taxes to other options to address state budget deficits such as other tax increases or budget cuts.

"When it comes to saving lives and injecting new revenue in depleted state coffers, we should not hesitate to support measures that will accomplish both," said Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association.

The report was released by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Cancer Society, Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The full report, "Tobacco Taxes: A Win-Win for Cash-Strapped States," is available at www.rwjf.org.

— Donya Currie



Photo courtesy Salt Lake Valley Health Department

A Utah resident receives a vaccination on camera as part of the Salt Lake Valley Health Department's new series of YouTube videos highlighting the role and faces of public health in Utah.

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