

Public Health & Human Services

Public health refers to the overall mental and physical health of a community. It includes surveillance and control of infectious disease and promotion of healthy behaviors among members of the community.

An assessment of the Airline community reveals that the area is void of hospitals and 24-hour medical clinics. There are a minimal number of physician's offices or dental clinics in the community. Residents must travel outside of the target area to receive quality medical and dental services. The nearest hospital, the Columbia Medical Center, is approximately 3 miles south of the target area. Residents may also receive medical services from the Harris County Health Department's satellite offices across the County. The nearest satellite office, the Aldine Community Health Center, is located at 4755 Aldine Mail Route, approximately 7 miles east of the target area. The Aldine Community Health Center serves the primary care needs of County residents living in Aldine and northeast Harris County. In addition to regular adult and pediatric services, the Aldine Community Health Center provides podiatry, dental, x-ray, mammography, lab, nutrition, health education, pharmacy, psychiatry, counseling and social services.

Immunizations are among the greatest public health achievements in modern history. Polio, measles, mumps, rubella, and whooping cough are no longer common death sentences for children. Although vaccinations are the most effective way of protecting children against these infectious diseases, the current immunization coverage rate in the greater Houston area is the fourth lowest in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2002 National Immunization Survey indicates that just 64 percent of children in Harris County are appropriately immunized at age two. Further, data from the 2003 Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) Retrospective Immunization Survey state that only 56 percent of children in the Airline community were appropriately immunized at age two. This alarmingly low immunization rate can lead to the outbreak of measles, mumps, rubella, and other infectious diseases. The low immunization rate in Airline may be attributed to the poverty, lower education rates, access to medical care, certain race/ethnic groups, and the number of single parent households. Efforts must be made to educate the public of the value of being appropriately immunized and provide greater access to medical services.

Public health resources for Airline adults and seniors are virtually non-existent in the target area. With an increasing adult and senior population, attention, information and services regarding diabetes, heart disease, all forms of cancer, high blood pressure and cholesterol, obesity, depression, domestic violence, and pregnancy are greatly needed.

A study conducted in early 2005 by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development indicates that Hispanic/Latino children are less likely than other children to have health insurance or recommended vaccinations. The report also indicates that Hispanic/Latino children are more likely to be

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overweight and become teen parents. These statistics do not bode well for Airline, a community that is predominately Hispanic/Latino.⁷

Childhood and adult obesity in America is reaching epidemic proportions. A lack of sidewalks and park space is contributing to this growing problem in the Airline community. Coordinated exercise programs with community organizations for youth, adults and seniors in Airline will help eradicate this silent killer.

The supply of unclean/unkept ditches, culverts, and abandoned properties might also threaten public health in Airline. Litter and debris are a prevalent problem plaguing Airline. Residents at the June 2005 community meeting stated that the problem continues to grow as individuals illegally dump trash in ditches and vacant lots. Many vacant lots are in dire need of mowing. Several residents stated that other area residents are burning trash and tires. These acts effectively destroy the community's beautification efforts. The household items and litter can collect water, which harbor and attract vermin and pests. Improperly discarded automotive equipment can release noxious toxins into the water table and contaminate the community's drinking water.

Picture 6.1: A Home in Violation of Public Health Codes



Source: HC CEDD, 2005

⁷ Cable News Network (2005 July 20). Report: Hispanic Children's Health Lags. Accessed July 20, 2005 from the Cable News Network Web site: http://www.cnn.com/2005/HEALTH/07/20/hispanic.children.ap/?section=cnn_health

Recommendations

A community health initiative that merges existing and imminent health resources will provide more efficient services to Airline residents. The following recommendations will assist in this objective.

1. 24-Hour Medical Clinic

Airline does not have a 24-Hour Medical Clinic. Residents must leave Airline for all emergent care needs. To bring a 24 Hour Medical Clinic to Airline:

- Partner with the Harris County Health Department and Harris County Precinct One to explore possibilities of bringing a mobile health provider or a 24 Hour Health Clinic to Airline
- Identify possible locations for a health clinic (existing or leased structure), possibly a community health clinic housed in a community center
- Investigate/explore partnerships with Precinct One, the Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services Department (HCPHES) to provide healthcare (immunizations, checkups, etc.) in the community (decide on frequency). The Airline Improvement District and the HCPHES should partner to bring mobile immunization units to the community. The Airline Improvement District can schedule immunization services with HCPHES to ensure that services are provided at convenient times for families (including evenings and weekends). The Airline Improvement District and HCPHES can distribute the information to the civic associations, schools, churches, apartment complexes, mobile home communities, and child care centers.
- Investigate school-based clinic opportunities (Galena Park ISD has a school based clinic at Cloverleaf Elementary)
- Investigate funding opportunities with other organizations to develop a clinic
- Develop a *Healthy Community Project* with the HCPHES – Health Education Division to promote disease prevention and healthy living and wellness

2. More Heavy Trash Collection Days/Litter Control

Litter is a problem throughout Airline. Not only is litter an eyesore, but old tires, plastic containers, fast-food cups, plastic shopping bags, mattresses, animal carcasses couches can collect water, which can be colonized by mosquitoes and other vermin and pests. Batteries and other automotive equipment/materials break down and release metal toxins into the watershed and ground wells where residents get their drinking water. To combat the litter and heavy trash/debris problem:

- The Airline Improvement District should develop a litter control/ heavy trash collection program (in collaboration with the Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services Department)
- Decide on the frequency of the heavy trash/litter pick-up

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- Create a partnership with appropriate County departments, businesses, schools, law enforcement, residents, and civic associations to combat littering
- Investigate the option of erecting 'no littering' signs in target hot spots in Airline; possibly contemplate the possibility of assessing a fine and asking the County to split the money for Airline Improvement District beautification efforts
- Get recycling bins in the community
- Precinct One provides one heavy trash pickup per subdivision per year at the request of the homeowner's association or the civic club

3. Ditch/Culvert Cleaning

Unkempt ditches and culverts are havens for animal carcasses, household items and litter. To have the ditches and culverts cleared in Airline:

- Contact the Precinct Road & Bridge Service Dept. (by phone or email) to report drainage issues (must be County right-of-way)