

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 20, 2011

### **Local Coalition Wins the Super Bowl! ADAPT coalition receives national recognition**

The Taney County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Team (ADAPT) was recently recognized as number one, nationally, for its efforts in Taney County to reduce the underage drinking rate. Maybe it isn't the Super Bowl, but in the arena of alcohol and drug abuse prevention, it is close. The coalition, established in 2008, is a collaborative effort of local government, health, school, and community partners addressing this important issue.

The coalition received the *Got Outcomes Milestones* award at the national Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) National Coalition Institute conference in Washington D.C. The *Milestones* award recognizes a coalition for their success in fighting substance abuse in their community by implementing a comprehensive and feasible plan guided by local data that includes program, practice, and policy changes. "The selection of the ADAPT coalition," stated Major General Arthur Dean Chairman and CEO of CADCA, "is an indication of the tremendous efforts put forth by this coalition to address local substance abuse problems."

The efforts of the ADAPT coalition have had positive results in Taney County. Initially, they identified high alcohol outlet density, retailers selling to minors, and low perceptions of risk associated with underage drinking that all contribute to higher levels of underage alcohol use. The coalition implemented strategies such as, drafting and enhancing local ordinances that require Branson retailers to attend alcohol retailer training classes, conduct alcohol compliance checks, launching an underage drinking awareness campaign in local schools, providing an alcohol free after prom event for all Taney County high schools and creating graduated sanctions for underage drinkers. "For a coalition to have achieved this level of community and local government support in a two-year period is remarkable and is the reason they were recognized nationally for their efforts," said Chris Davis, Deputy Director of Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention Community Partnership of the Ozarks, "to be selected from a field of 5000 coalitions is something our entire community should be proud of."

The Missouri School Survey is administered every two years for 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. The results of the 2010 survey show students have changed their perceptions of access to alcohol, awareness of harm, and risky behaviors compared to 2008. For example, fewer youth reported that alcohol is "sort of easy" or "very easy" to get (70 percent in 2008 compared to 37.5 percent in 2010), and fewer youth reported that in the past 30 days, they have been passengers in a car with someone who had been drinking alcohol (27.5 percent in 2008 compared to 14.04 percent in 2010). "These statistics reflect the education process is working along with the community efforts to enforce and support the prevention of underage drinking," said Kara Miller ADAPT member, "it takes several years for coalitions to have this sort of success, this coalition, and community have accomplished it in two years."

"The ADAPT coalition is a true leader in the field of substance abuse prevention, exemplifying the excellent work that coalitions are doing around the country to prevent and reduce substance use," said Major General Arthur Dean. "By using sound and strategic data-driven practices, the ADAPT coalition is challenging community social norms and perceptions related to underage drinking. Congratulations to them for contributing to reductions in substance abuse and associated problems at the local level."

For more information about ADAPT visit the Taney County Health Department website at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org) or call Kara Miller at (417) 334-4544 ext. 225.

\*\*\*

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
An Accredited Local Public Health Department

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**April 14, 2011**

### ***ABC'S OF SUN SAFETY***

The temperature is warming up and the sun is shining. It is time to get your shorts and t-shirts on and enjoy the great weather. While there are many benefits of enjoying the sunshine, it is also a good time to remember how to protect your skin from the harmful effects of sunlight.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States and melanoma is the most deadly form of skin cancer. In 2010, more than 68,000 people were diagnosed with melanoma and over 8,700 people died from this form of cancer in the U.S. alone.

People with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop skin cancer. Risk factors vary for different types of skin cancer, but some general factors are:

- A lighter natural skin color.
- Family history of skin cancer.
- A personal history of skin cancer.
- Exposure to the sun through work and play.
- A history of sunburns early in life.
- Skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun.
- Blue or green eyes.
- Blond or red hair.
- Certain types and a large number of moles.

Everyone should follow the **ABC's** of sun safety protection:

- **A** is for **AWAY**-Stay away from the midday sun, especially between the hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- **B** is for **BLOCK**-To block the sun, apply sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15 or higher, about 20 minutes before sun exposure. Make sure to reapply every two hours and after swimming or sweating. For babies, start applying sunscreen at six months of age.
- **C** is for **COVER UP**-Cover up with a wide-brim hat or visor when going outdoors to shade the face, head, ears, and neck. Wear clothing to protect your skin and remember to protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses that absorb UV radiation to protect the skin around your eyes.
- **S** is for **Shade**-Seek shade, especially during the midday hours. Keep infants under six months of age out of direct sunlight. Use an umbrella over the stroller.

Get out and enjoy the weather, but make sure to protect your skin first! For more information about skin cancer and sun safety, visit the Taney County Health Department website at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org)

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

April 27, 2011

**Taney County Animal Control Center Closes Temporarily**

*Animal Control Officers working to locate and rescue animals from flooded areas*

In response to the rising floodwater in our area, the Taney County Animal Center will close to the public temporarily. The Center will be closed to accommodate animals that have been displaced because of the flood. Animal Control officers will only respond to emergency calls. Any non-emergency calls will be responded to depending on officer availability.

If anyone needs assistance in locating an animal in a flooded area, they should call the Taney County Animal Control Center at (417) 332-0172 or the Taney County Health Department at (417) 334-4544 ext 224 to report a lost animal. "Safety is our first concern for the Animal Control Officers," said Laura Trog, Animal Control Manager, "but we will make every effort to help residents locate their animals." The officers will be patrolling near the flooded areas and will pick-up any strays. "This is a difficult time for everyone who has been affected by the flood and we will do our best to make sure residents are reunited with their pets," said Trog. The public is encouraged to call either of the numbers listed above if they are searching for, or found, a lost animal.

Adoption of animals from the Center will be suspended until it reopens for normal business, which will be announced. Animal adoptions are available through the Shepherd of the Hills Humane Society who is working closely with the Taney County Animal Center.

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
An Accredited Local Public Health Department

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**April 28, 2011**

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY AFTER A FLOOD**

### *Tips for Cleaning After the Floodwater Recedes*

Returning to a flood-damaged home, apartment or business may carry some risks and it is important to take extra precautions before and during clean up. First, check that electricity and propane are disconnected at your property site and that it is safe to enter the property.

Floodwater can carry bacteria, waste, and contaminants that may include sewage, chemicals from roads, farms and other areas. To protect yourself from potential illness, avoid direct contact with the water and mud, as much as possible. When cleaning after the floodwaters recede, wear waterproof boots and gloves, and wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Be aware there are many hidden dangers that can cause injury such as: broken glass, exposed nails jagged wood or metal and deep holes. Some of the most common injuries following a disaster are cuts to the feet, so if you must walk in floodwater, wear sturdy shoes and boots.

If you are in direct contact with floodwater or involved in the cleaning process after the floodwater recedes, consider being vaccinated against tetanus. It is recommended that you receive a booster shot if you have not had a Td or Tdap in the past two years. Contact the Taney County Health Department at either location for information about receiving a vaccination.

Mold can grow in buildings that are not dried out quickly. Only 48 hours after getting wet, a mattress, or couch can contain enough mold and fungi to present a health risk. People at highest risk are senior adults, young children, pregnant women, and people with asthma, allergies, respiratory conditions or a compromised immune system. Throw away porous materials that have been saturated with floodwater and cannot be adequately cleaned and dried--such as carpet, upholstered furniture, and mattresses. Sheetrock that has been submerged in floodwater **MUST** be replaced. Scrub hard surfaces and items with warm water and laundry detergent. Rinse with clear water and then rinse again with a mixture of one gallon of water to ¼-cup household bleach. Let this mixture set for five minutes, rinse again with clear water and then allow it to dry completely or the mold and fungi will return. Wash clothing in hot soapy water.

Food safety is another critical issue related to cleaning after the flood. The **ONLY** food that can be salvaged must be in an aluminum can that has been thoroughly washed and cleaned. All other food products must be thrown away.

For more information, contact either office, Branson at (417) 334-4544 or Forsyth at (417) 546-4725. More clean-up information is available on our website [www.taneycohealth.org/emergency response/flood clean up](http://www.taneycohealth.org/emergency_response/flood_clean_up).

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**April 29, 2011**

### **Private Well Water Testing After the Flood**

*Health Department offers free water testing for private wells*

After the floodwaters recede households who have a private well as their drinking water source are encouraged to have the water tested. Private wells that have been compromised by the floodwater have a greater risk of being contaminated with E.coli and other forms of bacteria that can cause health risks. If you live in area that has been in the mandatory evacuation zone or have experienced high floodwaters, or near your property, then you should have your water tested.

The Taney County Health Department will offer one free private drinking water test per household that may have been impacted by the floodwaters in Taney County. The Health Department only tests for Coliforms and E.coli bacteria. Coliforms are a family of bacteria that E.coli belong to and are indicators of contaminated water due to exposure to fecal matter.

“At this time the health department has not been notified of any boil orders issued by DNR,” said Laura Jahn, Environmental Division Supervisor, “We want to provide peace of mind for individuals who have been impacted by the floodwaters and assure they have safe drinking water.”

Water sample kits may be picked up at either of the Taney County Health Department location, Branson at 320 Rinehart Road and Forsyth at 15479 State Hwy. 160. The samples must be returned the same day as they are taken; Monday –Thursday from 8:00 am to 3:00 p.m. No samples will be accepted on Friday. For more information, please visit our website at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org) or call the Environmental Division at (417) 334-4544 ext. 247.

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**May 12, 2011**

### **Taney County Animal Control Center Reopens for Adoptions**

The Taney County Animal Control Center recently suspended animal adoptions to respond to animals that were displaced during the floods. The Center has resumed normal operations and services, effective immediately.

The Center was prepared to handle an increase in the number of animals that needed shelter during the rising floodwaters. "During the flooding, officers conducted patrols around flooded areas in the city of Branson to identify animals running at large which may have come from those areas," said, Laura Trog, Animal Control Supervisor. "We are happy to once again be open to the public for animal adoptions and have a variety of animals available that would make a great family pet."

The Taney County Animal Control Center is located at 255 Critter Trail off Hwy 165 in Hollister. The Center is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. For information about adoptions or other animal control issues please call (417) 332-0172 or visit our website at [www.taneycohealth.org/animal\\_adoptions](http://www.taneycohealth.org/animal_adoptions).

**###**

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

Taney County Health Department



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

May 24, 2011

### Taney County Animal Control Center Responds to Emergency Situations

Emergency response is a part of public health that many may not recognize. For the second time in a very short period, the Taney County Animal Control Center is responding to emergencies that will change the normal flow of activity.

Due to the emergency in Joplin as well as the potential for more flooding locally, the Center will not be accepting surrendered dogs or cats. The Center remains open for all other purposes. Animal control officers and kennel staff will prioritize calls and accept animals as space is available. Local rescued animals are available for adoption during normal business hours.

“We work closely with the Joplin Humane Society and some of our staff has responded to assist them in the recovery and management of animals that have been displaced after the tornado,” said Laura Trog, Taney County Animal Control supervisor. In addition to the Joplin disaster, the Center is preparing to receive more animals that may be displaced if floodwaters rise in our local area. “We feel it is the right decision to temporarily hold the limited space we have available for animals that may be displaced from their owners, if floodwaters rise,” said Trog.

The Center is open from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm Monday through Saturday for adoptions. Please contact the Animal Control Center if you have any questions or need assistance with an animal at (417) 332-0172. Visit our website to view the animals currently available for adoption at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org).

As we all struggle to understand the disaster that has struck our neighbors many are seeking ways to assist. Due to the tremendous increase of animals sheltered at the Joplin Humane Society, additional food and supplies are needed, specifically canned food. Donations of canned dog and cat food may be dropped off at either Taney County Health Department location and will be transported to the Joplin Humane Society. The Branson office is located at 320 Rinehart Road (417) 334-4544 and the Forsyth office (417) 546-4725 is located in Cedar Square Shopping Center in Forsyth.

All Taney County Health Department staff members have been trained to respond in an emergency. The recent destruction in Joplin has resulted in a number of staff responding to assist in various capacities. Environmental public specialists and nurses join the animal control officers in responding to the tremendous needs that face our neighbors at this time. As their community struggles to recover, the Taney County Health Department staff will continue to support in their recovery as the need arises.

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: muellf@lpha.mopublic.org

**Taney County Health Department**



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.  
*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**July 18, 2011**

## **New Adult Vaccination Programs at Taney County Health Department**

International travel and immigration vaccines now available

Are you planning on vacationing abroad or traveling outside the United States as part of a mission trip?  
Do you need to update your immunizations for the immigration process?

Recently, the Taney County Health Department was approved to provide international travel and immigration vaccinations, and has expanded the availability of other adult vaccinations. Adult vaccines offered and most often recommended for international travel or immigration include; Yellow Fever, Typhoid, Polio, Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis (Tdap), Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Menactra and Varicella. In addition, the "Shingles" vaccine is now available.

An important part of planning for travel outside the United States is determining if vaccinations are required for the place you will be visiting. For the most up-to-date travel vaccination recommendations, visit the Taney County Health Department website at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org) for a link to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) travel vaccinations. Some of the vaccines are given in a series or will be ordered upon request; it is advised that you plan well in advance of your departure date to receive vaccines. There are fees charged for these vaccines and appointments are required.

The need for vaccinations doesn't end in childhood. There are vaccines and boosters needed at different ages and for different circumstances to stay healthy. The "shingles" (Herpes Zoster), is a good example of a relatively new vaccine available for adults. This vaccine is recommended for anyone over the age 60 who has had chicken pox. The same virus that causes chicken pox stays in the body and can later resurface as shingles, a painful, blistering rash. Talk with your physician or visit the Taney County Health Department website for recommended adult vaccinations.

"Providing vaccinations is an important role of public health. Our decision to more fully develop the adult vaccination program will benefit the community, by offering easier access to adult vaccines required for international travel and immigration," said Pam Priest, RN, Clinical Division Manager. "We look forward to serving the community in this capacity."

Call the Taney County Health Department at (417) 334-4544 Branson or (417) 546-4725 Forsyth, to learn more about the adult vaccination program and fees or to make an appointment.

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

Taney County Health Department



*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 9, 2011

It is that time of year again to think about getting flu shots. The best way to protect yourself and your family against influenza is to get a flu shot every year. The Taney County Health Department has scheduled flu shot clinics for anyone who has a chronic illness or over age 65.

The flu shot clinics will be held at the Forsyth office located at 15479 US Hwy 160 on Tuesday, September 20 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and in Branson at the Branson Rec Plex located at 1500 Branson Hills Parkway on Thursday, September 29 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

“This year we are offering a new high-dose flu vaccine for anyone over age 65,” said Pam Priest, Clinical Division Manager. “This vaccine offers a greater protection for those most vulnerable to complications from influenza.”

Flu vaccine for children is available at both the Forsyth and Branson locations by appointment during normal business hours. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend children age 6 months and older receive the flu shot.

It is especially important for people of all ages with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, or asthma, to get a flu shot. Family or caregivers of a person with a chronic disease should also get a flu shot so they can stay healthy.

Contact the Taney County Health Department at (417) 546-4725 Forsyth location or (417) 334-4544 Branson location for more information about the flu clinics or visit our website at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org).

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. # 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

**Taney County Health Department**



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 30, 2011

**Taney County Health Department Commemorates 50th Anniversary**

The Taney County Health Department celebrated 50 years of community service on Friday, November 18. Approved by a vote of the public in 1960, the Taney County Health Department began serving the public health needs of the county on Main Street in Forsyth on February 26, 1961.

“As we look ahead for the next several years, the Board and Staff must keep the established vision to serve the people. Our greatest challenge is to sustain the high level of services now provided and to continuously assess the public health needs of Taney County.” said Jim Berry, Director of the Taney County Health Department, during the commemoration of 50 years of community service.

Many of the services now provided by the Taney County Health Department, including immunizations, tuberculosis screening, family planning, dental visits, and sanitation were established within the first ten years of growth between 1961 and 1971 under the direction of the first Board of Trustees. The members at that time were, Kenneth Puchta, Chairman, Fred Wilson, Wayne Gott, Jean Blunk and Mildred Hinckley.

A series of expansions and location changes have been the distinctive events of recent years. In 1991, the health department moved from the Forsyth Main Street location to the current location of the Eastern office in Forsyth’s Cedar Square Shopping Center.

In 1994, Skaggs Regional Medical Center partnered with the Taney County Health Department to establish the Department’s first Western Taney County location in the former Paramount Hotel owned by the hospital. As services and demand increased, the Taney County Health Department grew through a series of location changes before developing the current property on Rinehart Road. In February of 2008, the City of Branson and Taney County Health Departments integrated to provide a central location for all public health services.

Western Commissioner of Taney County, Jim Strafuss, presented a proclamation designating Friday, November 18, 2011, as The Celebration Day of the Taney County Health Department’s 50 Year Anniversary. By signing this proclamation, the Commissioners of Taney County, “urge our citizens to recognize that public health is working to ensure that all Taney County residents enjoy a healthy lifestyle and safe environment.”

\*\*\*

Contact:  
Jean Mueller,  
Public Information Officer  
Taney County Health Department  
(417)334-4544 ext # 224  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Office: (417) 334-4544 ext. #224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

Taney County Health Department



*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 2, 2011

**Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Contract Renewed**

The Taney County Health Department announced a contract to continue providing WIC (Women, Infants and Children) services for the fiscal year 2012 has been signed with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

Under terms of the contract, the Taney County Health Department can serve 2,014 people who are eligible for WIC services every month. During the 2011 contract year, approximately 2,038 participants received WIC benefits each month in Taney County. WIC, a supplemental food program provides, at no cost to the participant, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and checks for nutritious supplemental foods to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5. WIC participants are those who meet income guidelines and are determined by health professionals to be at nutritional risk.

WIC supplemental food packages are specifically chosen to provide foods high in protein, iron, calcium, and Vitamins A and C. Eligible women and children receive fortified milk, cheese, eggs, cereal, whole wheat bread, tortillas or brown rice, fruits and vegetables and canned or dried beans or peanut butter. Although WIC recommends breastfeeding, infants receive supplemental iron fortified formula when needed, and infant cereal and baby food at the appropriate age. Participants are issued checks to buy these foods at authorized local retail stores.

WIC is administered locally at the Taney County Health Department at both the Forsyth and Branson locations. Those interested in applying for WIC or in need of more information should contact the Taney County Health Department at the Forsyth location at (417) 546-4725 or 1-888-707-4725 or at the Branson location at (417) 334-4544 or 1-888-294-9530 or visit us on the web at [www.taneycohealth.org](http://www.taneycohealth.org).

“In accordance with Federal Law and US Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write to the USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave SW, Washington DC, 20250-9410 or call 1-800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TTY). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.”

###

Contact: Jean Mueller  
Taney County Health Department  
320 Rinehart Road  
Phone: (417) 334-4544 ext. # 224  
Cell: (417) 230-0725  
Email: [muellf@lpha.mopublic.org](mailto:muellf@lpha.mopublic.org)

Taney County Health Department



*An Accredited Local Public Health Department*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 9, 2011

### Stay Healthy During the Holidays

As the holiday season gains momentum, shopping, attending social gatherings, and spending time with family and friends can become a common time for the spread of disease and illness. Practicing these illness prevention tips from the Taney County Health Department can help reduce the risk of getting sick this holiday season.

Washing your hands is the best way to prevent the spread of illness. Warm water and soap lathered in the hands especially after using the restroom, before preparing foods and eating is the best way to practice good hand washing.

"It is easy to get busy with all of the holiday activities and skip this very important prevention step," said Jean Mueller, Taney County Health Department Public Information Officer. Staying home if you are ill and keeping sick children home from school and daycare are also good ways to prevent the spread of illness. Cooks and guests in social settings have an increased likelihood of coming in contact with germs that cause illness.

"Food safety starts with soap," said Craig Rhoads, Environmental Health Specialist with the Health Department. "Be sure to work soap into a lather for 20 seconds," Rhoads said. "Wash around rings and under fingernails. Rinse hands thoroughly under running water and use a dry paper towel to turn the faucet off." Utensils and counters also need to be sanitized with a bleach solution after each use and/or between preparing raw meats and ready to eat foods.

Rhoads also recommends ensuring foods are prepared at safe temperatures. Cold foods should be held at 41 F or less and hot foods at 140 F or above. As a precaution, foods should not be left at room temperature for more than four hours.

While the best way to protect your health is by washing your hands often, there is no way to completely avoid contact with germs this holiday season. Recognizing flu symptoms is the first step in treating and preventing the flu. The most common flu symptoms are: fever, coughing, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches, body aches, chills and fatigue.

Following basic public health practices during the holidays, such as washing hands, staying home if you're sick and adhering to proper food handling and preparation techniques, can help prevent you and your family from getting sick or from spreading illness to others.

\*\*\*