

Berrien County Health Department revises website

By JULIE SWIDWA - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, November 7, 2013 5:00 am

BENTON HARBOR - The Berrien County Health Department has rebuilt its website, promising easier-to-find answers to a host of questions from diseases and vaccines and community health initiatives.

Vita Benson, director of program operations for the health department, showed off the new website Wednesday morning to members of the Berrien County Health Board at the board's monthly meeting.

"The community wants to be able to find things. We decided which services get highlighted based on clients' use of services and high-click items on the previous website," she said.

Catherine Thieneman, liaison to the health board for the Berrien County Board of Commissioners, said the county worked with the health department to develop and launch the new site, and the easy-to-use site was the result of that cooperation.

Health department staff decided what information should be on the site and Ken Hoffman, director, and Kimber Tomoske, operations manager, from the county's Information Systems department worked with a professional web developer to create the site.

The new website features a health department calendar of events and a "How do I?" tab with a scroll-down menu of topics. For example, select "Ensure a Healthy Pregnancy" and be instantly linked to the health department's Nurse Family Partnership. That program links first-time mothers-to-be with nurses who will help them through pregnancy and the first two years of their child's life.

Or click on "Get a copy of a birth certificate" and be linked to the Berrien County Clerk's Office and instructions for the process. Benson said people often call the health department about birth certificates, and they are not available through the health department.

The health department website's home page features links to "Hot Topics" such as flu season, substance abuse and communicable disease reporting, and quick links to topics for children, adults, schools, businesses and medical providers.

The Board of Health also got a look at two new Be Healthy Berrien websites: www.eatlocalberrien.org and www.beactiveberrien.org.

Be Healthy Berrien is a county-wide partnership between several organizations working to reduce obesity and chronic illness, and increase overall health and wellness. Partners include the health department, Lakeland HealthCare, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, United Way of Southwest Michigan, Benton Harbor-St. Joseph YMCA, and Niles-Buchanan YMCA.

Nicki Britten, the department's community health planning director, gave the board a tour around the new websites. The Eat Local Berrien site will help users find healthy, fresh, local food in Berrien County. Locations of U-pick farms, farmer's markets and other places to find fresh produce will show up on a map where people can get directions to the locations.

The Be Active Berrien website helps people find places to be active in Berrien County. People can add locations that others might not be aware of.

Britten said that besides helping residents find places to eat healthy and be active, both of the new websites are likely to help boost the area's economy because people from out of the area often visit Berrien County's farms, beaches and other amenities.

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