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Beaver Island Shows Up
One-day vaccination clinic welcomes 101 residents

When nurses and public health technicians from the Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) fly to Beaver Island, they're prepared for a busy day. Vaccine clinics on the island draw a crowd.

Earlier in October, 101 clients came to the school gymnasium for vaccines. A total of 184 immunizations were given that day—80 flu, 81 updated COVID-19, and 23 childhood vaccines. The childhood vaccines given included Tdap, HPV, Meningococcal, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Polio, and Varicella.

"It's truly remarkable that we had 101 people come to the clinic," says Wil Cwikel, Beaver Island Community School Superintendent. Cwikel annually provides space for clinics and transportation to and from the airport for HDNW staff and their supplies.

For Beaver Island, 101 people represent nearly one-fifth of the fall/winter population. One clinic. One day. Nearly 20 percent of the residents vaccinated. This high turnout is consistent.

- In 2022, HDNW saw 105 clients and gave 176 immunizations.
- In 2021, the traveling team saw 102 clients and gave 127 immunizations.

"While history helps us be prepared for the great response, each year our team is reminded of the internal rewards of working in public health," says Melissa Hahn, HDNW Director of Family Health. "Not only do we get to help keep residents on Beaver Island protected from serious illness, but we are treated so well—the people are always happy to see us and make us feel welcomed."

"It's a pretty amazing experience," adds Courtney Mullens, HDNW nurse who's part of the travel team.

What makes Beaver Island residents so responsive to vaccines? Cwikel believes it's their care for each other. The island is tight knit. They know they're more isolated than people living on the mainland. And most residents are advanced in age.

"We have a sense of pride in having so many people get vaccinated," Cwikel says. "Regardless of how many people personally feel about vaccinations, whether they need them or not, they get vaccines for the community. In getting vaccines, we might contribute to the health and wellness of those around us."

"Also, we don't criticize others if they do or don't get vaccines," he adds. "There's no drama around getting your vaccines."

In addition, the clinics are convenient. Parents come to the school and get their children out of class to easily update their vaccinations. At the same time, parking is convenient for all residents, and the clinic well promoted.

"People who come to the clinic genuinely appreciate the health department sending six professionals over here to help them out," Cwikel says.

Cutline: The Health Department of Northwest Michigan traveling team, a group of public health techs and nurses, is already at the next flu clinic at Charlevoix Elementary School on Thursday, Oct. 19 at Charlevoix Elementary School where more than 90 people registered for vaccinations.

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