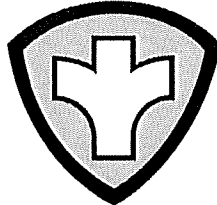


2023 Rusk County Public Health  
Annual Report  
Rusk County, Wisconsin



*Rusk County*  
WISCONSIN



**PUBLIC HEALTH**  
PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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**The mission of the Rusk County Health and Human Services, Public Health Department, is to maximize the quality of life across the lifespan by promoting health, protecting the environment, and preventing disease and injury.**

# Rusk County Public Health Oversight

## Health and Human Services Elected Board

Phil Schneider, Chairperson  
Randy Tatur, Vice Chairperson  
Dave Willingham  
Mark Schmitt  
Tom Hanson  
Dan Gudis  
Lois Goode

## Health and Human Services Citizen Members

Ted Hakala  
Mary Schneider  
Dr. John Ziemer

## Medical Advisor

Dr. Brandon Parkhurst

# Rusk County Health and Human Services- Public Health Staff

## Executive Director HHS

Jeremy Jacobs

## Public Health Officer

Kaylee Bugbee, BSN, RN (started May 2023)

## Nurse

Amanda Weinert, RN

## Nurse

Lisa Wicik, LPN

## Nurse

Tahlia Lueck, LPN (started November 2023)

## Environmental Health Specialist

Maggie Huettl, MPH (started June 2023)

## Birth To 3 Coordinator

Sarah Cegler

## WIC Staff

Kayla Olmstead, Registered Dietician (MS, RD, CD)

Amber Feira, Competent Professional Authority (CPA, IBCLC)

Sara Hazard, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor (through May 2023)

Jennifer Ruff, Breastfeeding Peer Counselor (started June 2023)

## Support Staff

Virginia Jacobs

Lora Wimer

Tonya Sweeney

## **2023 Year in Review- Community Health Assessment**

These past few years, the Covid-19 pandemic was at the center of most of what public health did. Public health offices throughout the nation were working to provide information and resources to the community in efforts to keep people safe and mitigate risk. Rusk County Public Health was no exception We coordinated distribution of supplies and worked to administer vaccines to the community, all while providing up to date information and updates on the health of our community. Other public health programs did not receive as much staff time as they normally would have and many committees and coalitions that had been formed with members of the community were no longer meeting with the same regularity and often were not meeting at all. The Covid-19 State of Public Health Emergency ended on May 11, 2023, and while that does not mean that Covid-19 went away, we have begun to look once again at the general health of our community and identify gaps and areas for improvement. We are working to renew community partnerships.

Public health departments throughout the state experienced increased staff turnover in the past few years and Rusk County was no exception. We currently have four full time employees and three have been with the department for less than a year. We hired a new health officer (myself) in May, a new environmental health specialist in June, and a new nurse to head our reproductive health and preparedness programs in November. We also hired a new part time Breast-Feeding Peer Counselor to work part time with to support of our breastfeeding WIC moms in June of 2023.

We worked with Marshfield Medical Center (MMC) and Wisconsin Institute of Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) and conducted our Community Health Assessment (CHA). The CHA is something that every public health office needs to conduct every three to five years. This is a way to identify the needs of our community, what community members view as most pressing issues, and review data to assess the health of county, tracking trends. This was a multi month project that we began planning for in June and Public Health published our report in December. The report is available online by clicking on the Public Health webpage (located at <https://ruskcounty.org/publichealth>), or at [https://ruskcounty.org/vertical/sites/%7B0E3C6206-148D-4975-AF41-4ECFC3FF0AF0%7D/uploads/2023\\_Rusk\\_County\\_Community\\_Health\\_Assessment\\_Report.pdf](https://ruskcounty.org/vertical/sites/%7B0E3C6206-148D-4975-AF41-4ECFC3FF0AF0%7D/uploads/2023_Rusk_County_Community_Health_Assessment_Report.pdf)

The CHA process involved a kick off in July where we invited community stakeholders and those interested to learn more about the process and the why behind it. August was spent surveying the community by having paper surveys available at businesses throughout the county, and encouraging people to fill out a paper copy or take the same

survey online. In total we collected over 450 surveys. In September, we had focus groups facilitated by WIPPS that looked deeper at issues that were repeatedly mentioned in the CHA surveys. This included mental health concerns, drug and alcohol abuse, concerns with unhealthy lifestyles caused by lack of physical activity and unhealthy food choices, and concerns for our aging population. In October, the data was presented in a community meeting that was open to anyone interested in learning more. Those present then voted on their top three concerns. In December, the final report was issued. We used the findings of the Community Health Assessment to inform our focus for our Community Health Improvement Plan, Rusk County Public Health has decided to focus on increasing the physical activity of the community and building resiliency when it comes to mental health- specifically anxiety and depression, and remove the stigma that is still often present with mental health concerns.

We focused on community outreach and rebuilding those relationships with other groups in our community. Coalitions resumed meeting, and new groups formed, we did outreach in areas such as Narcan training, starting a lending closet in WIC, bringing in two mobile dental providers, encouraging families to be sure their children were caught up on childhood immunizations, and making improvements to our programs to better serve the community.

We are excited to continue building relationships in our community and are continually looking for ways to improve the health of our community so that Rusk County residents can live healthy lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaylee Bugbee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kaylee Bugbee, BSN RN  
Public Health Officer

## **2023 Community Outreach**

These are groups, committees, and organizations that Public Health worked closely with locally in 2023.

### **Rusk County Youth Council**

This group meets monthly. The mission of Rusk County Youth Council is to combine the resources of the county for the purpose of preventing and solving violence, alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems of our children and youth by integrating resources through communication and collaborative planning towards prevention of at-risk behavior, encouragement of health and wellness, positive youth development, and resiliency for youth ages 0-21 and their families.

### **Coordinated Community Response**

This community group is spearheaded by Embrace staff and looks at ways we can work together to address disparities in our community. The group is made up of variety of groups including staff from Embrace, Rusk County Public Health, Rusk County Children and Family, Marshfield Medical Center, and others interested in ways to improve services provided in the community and share resources.

### **Infant Safety Committee**

The Infant Safety Committee was started in late 2023 to look at what we as a community could do to ensure the safety of infants in Rusk County. This group meets monthly. It has evolved into a sharing of resources for the community and the mission has expanded to encompass families with children. The committee is made up of members of Health and Human Services, Indianhead Community Action Agency, Embrace, Choices Health Network, various county departments and interested community members. This group continues to develop plans for community outreach with a special focus on those that have a new infant in the household.

### **Traffic Safety Commission**

The Traffic Safety Commission meets quarterly and reviews traffic safety data for Rusk County. Potential problem areas are identified and work is done to see what we can do to improve the safety of our county. Members have varying backgrounds- from law enforcement, government, public health, EMS, Rusk County Transit Commission, citizens, and more. More information about the group can be found at <https://ruskcounty.org/trafficsafety>

## **Local Emergency Planning Committee**

The Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) meets quarterly to discuss hazmat planning, review offsite plans of businesses in the county, and review any potential hazardous spills or chemical releases that have occurred and plans to mitigate these. The committee is made up of the Emergency Manager, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff, law enforcement, local government officials, public health staff, highway department staff, and others in the community. More information can be found at <https://ruskcounty.org/lepc>

Rusk County Public Health also works regionally with other public health departments in the area to share knowledge and information. Below are some of the regional groups we are a part of and the work we are doing in these groups.

## **Western Wisconsin Public Health Readiness Consortium (WWPHRC)**

This group meets regularly to work together for coordinating of emergency plans. Twenty-two local public and tribal health offices are a part of this consortium. By working together, we can strengthen our capacity to respond effectively to health emergencies. This could include things like bioterrorism, infectious disease outbreaks, or natural disasters. More information can be found at <https://www.wwphrc.org/>

## **Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards**

**(WALHDAB)** WALHDAB "is the state-wide organization of boards of health members and health department administrators providing a unified forum for public health leadership development, advocacy, education, and forging of community partnerships for the improvement of public health at the local level." (Bylaws, Article II–Mission). The WALHDAB–Western Region group meets in person each month and often has a weekly conference call to discuss current issues departments may be facing or have questions regarding. WALHDAB also offers support for new health officers through in person conferences three times a year, and by offering a mentorship program that pairs newer health officers with more experienced health officers. WALHDAB is a great resource for our local office.

## **WALHDAB Environmental Health Section**

Environmental Health (EH) staff actively participates in WALHDAB-EH. The EH Section of WALHDAB meets quarterly and creates a forum for local health department EH professionals via email. The organization provides discussion on topics that affect local health departments across the state, regardless of their size, agent status, or EH capacity. Members keep abreast of current legislative actions affecting EH programming

in the state, and seek to provide direction in EH policy including requesting legislative action on current EH issues.

### **Western Region Environmental Association (WREN)**

WREN was formed in 2015, for Environmental Health staff to collaborate on topics specific to Western Wisconsin. Environmental Health staff meets quarterly to converse about concerns, licensing matters and legislation affecting Western Wisconsin.

### **Wisconsin Environmental Health Association (WEHA)**

Environmental Health staff attends conferences and workshops sponsored by WEHA. Conference and workshop attendance educate Environmental Health staff on regulation, enforcement, and general environmental health topics important to environmental health staff in public health.

## **Public Health Programs**

Birth to Three

Communicable Disease Program

Dental Services

DNR Transient Non-Community Well Program and DTATCP Certified Microbiological Water Lab

Environmental Health Program

Food Safety and Recreational Licensing (FSRL) Full Agent Program

Immunization Program

Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Maternal Child Health (MCH)

Narcan Direct Program

Public Health Preparedness Program

Reproductive Health Program

School Nurse

Women Infant and Children (WIC) Program



# **Public Health Programs Updates**

## **Birth to Three**

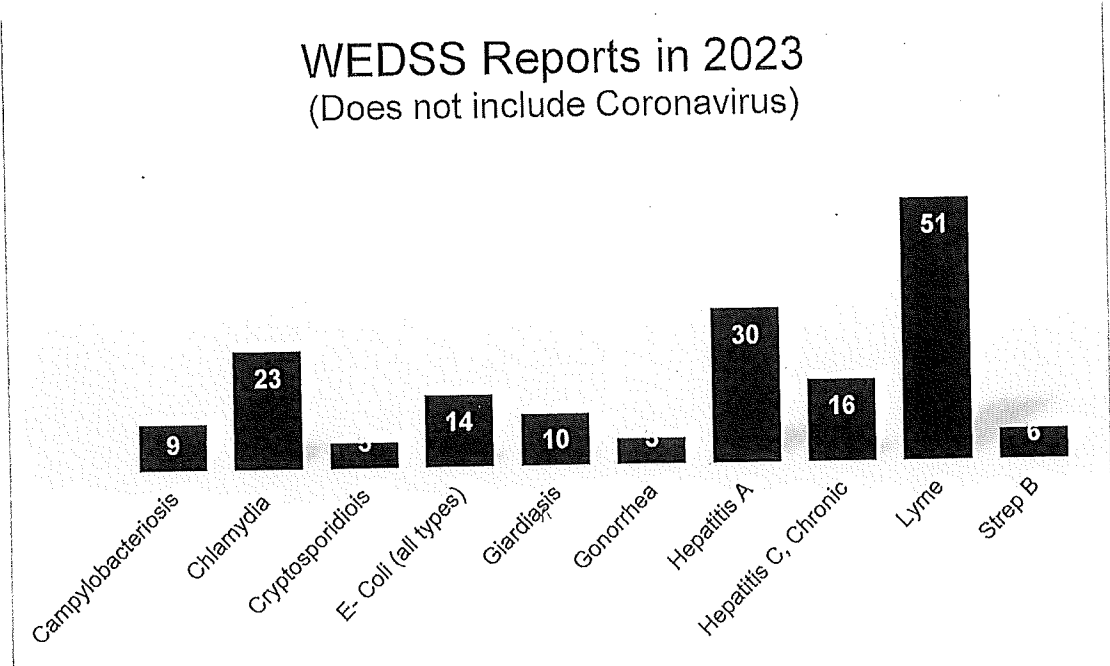
Birth to 3 is available for children from birth through thirty-six months of age, with a diagnosed condition or developmental delay in one or more areas of development. Rusk County Birth to 3 received forty-two referrals in 2023. Referral sources are primarily from childcare providers, WIC, Child Protective Services, parents, and doctors. 14 of the 42 referrals were determined eligible for the program based on IDEA criteria. We served on average sixteen families throughout 2023. We had ten children transition out of the program for either closing the gap in development or turning three years old. Of the ten, four did not need a referral to the LEA or local school district who is responsible for supporting children with developmental delays starting at age three. The Birth to 3 Program supports the child's development through building parent's confidence and competence in understanding child development, their child's specific developmental needs and how to implement strategies to encourage growth through changing the environment and/or interaction style during daily family routines.

## **Communicable Disease Program**

Rusk County Public Health is responsible for following up on communicable diseases that are found in our community. Wisconsin Statute 252.05 and 145.04 requires health care providers to report any communicable or vector-borne diseases or suspected communicable disease they treat. Most of these are reported through the Wisconsin Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WEDSS). Public health uses this data to ensure that patients receive needed treatments, monitor the health of the community, and in some cases, to watch for patterns. For instance, if there is suddenly an increase in enteric related illnesses, our staff will call the affected patients, and conduct a phone interview to determine if there is a common factor such as drinking water from an unsafe source, people eating at the same gathering or restaurant, or purchasing the same food item from a store. If a common factor can be determined, further steps can be taken to keep people from coming into contact with the cause.

In 2024, we had over one thousand WEDSS cases that were reviewed by public health staff. 803 of these were Coronavirus cases. As the Coronavirus state of emergency ended, we moved from calling all positive cases to monitoring number of cases in the county, and reaching out only to those who were hospitalized. We now monitor the number of positive cases in the county and hospitalizations. See chart to review other common cases. (Note, this is not a complete list of all WEDSS reports. Many incidents

were five or less cases for the year, and not all reports mean the disease was a confirmed case.)



## Dental Services

Rusk County Public Health has partnered with two different dental services to increase access to dental care in our county. Both companies will come to Public Health and see patients here. We typically try to coordinate their scheduled days with WIC clinic days to make it even easier for families to be seen.

Bridging Brighter Smiles comes quarterly and will provide dental cleanings, screenings, fluoride varnish, sealants, and silver diamine fluoride treatment for children and mothers enrolled in WIC. They will also assist in referring patients to dentists that may be able to see them from further or more extensive issues.

Northlakes Community Center also comes quarterly and will provide screenings and sealants for any children in the county.

## DNR Transient Non-Community Well Program and DTATCP Certified Microbiological Water Lab

Under a contract with the DNR, the Rusk County Public Health Department administers the DNR Transient Non-Community (TN) Well Program, which involves testing drinking

water and evaluating systems of public facilities within the county. Environmental Health staff conducts a sanitary survey (inspection) of systems enrolled in the program every 5 years, evaluating the well and distribution system for contamination risks. Deficiencies, ranked by severity, are noted in a letter sent to the operator, along with compliance dates. On an annual basis, water is tested for coliform bacteria and nitrates. Exceedances of Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) are followed up with additional testing, remediation, and public notification as required. Bacteria samples are analyzed in-house or at Commercial Testing Lab in Colfax.

Drinking water samples are analyzed for coliform bacteria and E. Coli at Rusk County's own DATCP-certified laboratory. Samples are dated, processed, incubated for 24 hours, and read out for safety based upon whether or not a color change has occurred. Samples positive for coliform bacteria are read under a black light to determine the presence of E. Coli. Compliance sample results for public systems are reported online to the DNR. In addition to TN systems, our lab also processes samples for area municipalities and private residences.

## **Environmental Health Program**

An Environmental Health Specialist, Public Health Officer, and support staff are available to respond to concerns and questions from the general public, including, but not limited to: food and water safety; hazardous materials such as asbestos, lead, mercury, radon, and carbon monoxide; indoor air quality; mold; general sanitation; pest and vector activity; and safe housing. Home and site visits are frequently conducted to evaluate and address concerns involving health and safety of the environment.

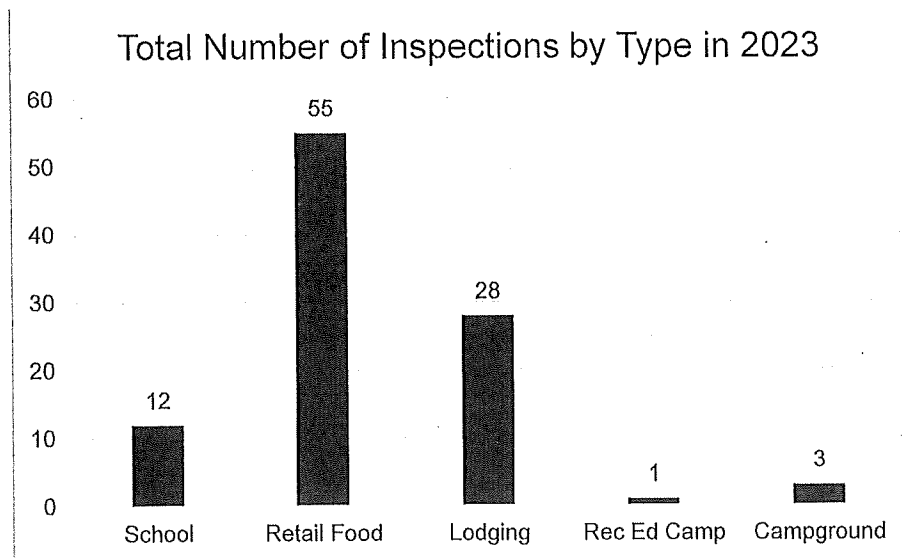
Well water testing is available through the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH) on a fee-exempt basis for WIC clients and for investigative purposes. Coliform Bacteria, Nitrate, Arsenic, Lead, and Manganese testing is available through Rusk County Environmental Health for private well owners and facilities that serve water to the public, including municipalities, for a nominal fee. Annual testing for the presence of nitrates and bacteria is recommended by the WI DNR. Once every five years a sanitary survey is completed on wells serving water to the public, such as restaurants or campgrounds. A sanitary survey is an onsite review of the wells safety and capacity to supply safe water to the public. The DNR will require a Level 2 Assessment in cases where public water systems detect coliform bacteria. Public Health assists with public notification, completes assessments at non-community public water systems, and responds to health-related questions.

Memorial Park Beach and Trails End Camp beach are tested for E. coli weekly, from Memorial Day to Labor Day. It is important to test for this, because elevated E.coli

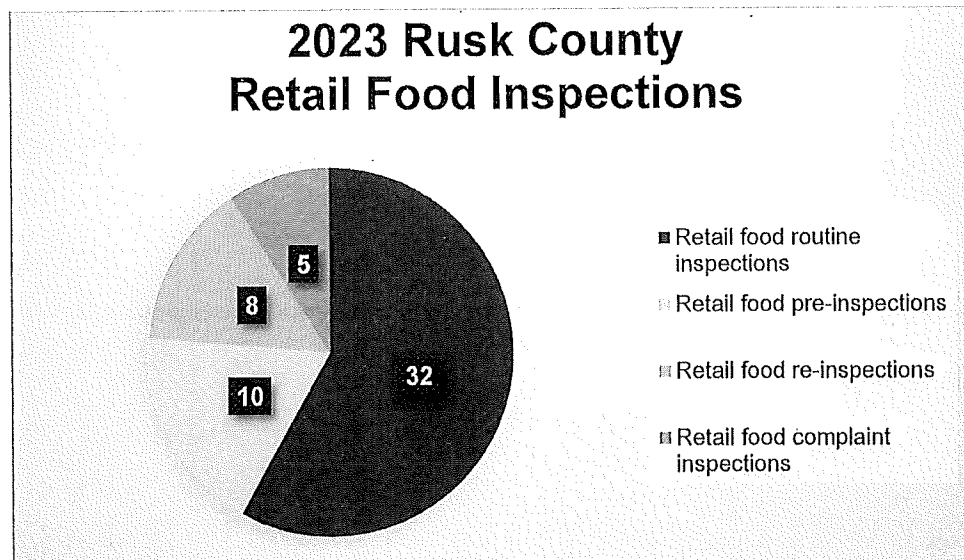
levels can result illness to swimmers and beach users. E. coli can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache or fever. E. coli can end up in beach water through a variety of ways. It can occur after a large amount of rainfall in a short period of time which can lead to ground runoff. The presence of animal feces on the beach can wash into the water and also cause elevated levels. And, it is not uncommon for river water to have some E. coli present due to the constantly moving water. Staff collect a sample each week and then process the sample in a lab set up in the environmental health office inside public health. Advisories or closures may be issued based upon results. We also report weekly results to the DNR who share these on their beach advisory webpage which can be found at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Beaches/AdvisoryMap.html> Other beach water may be tested, as requested, for a nominal fee.

### **Food Safety and Recreational Licensing (FSRL) Full Agent Program**

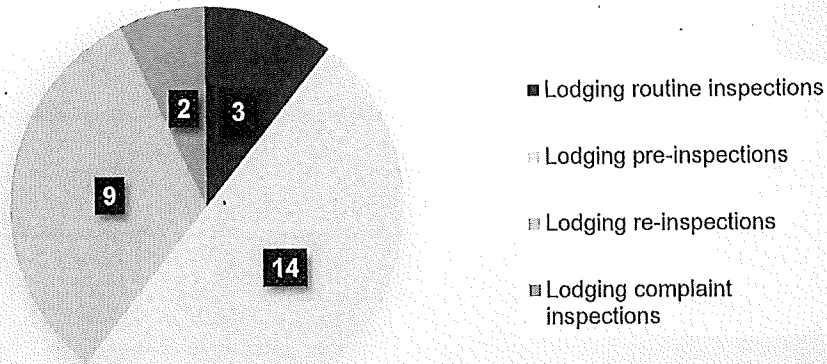
Under the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Food & Recreational Business contract, Environmental Health Staff conduct inspections of campgrounds, lodging facilities (including bed and breakfasts, tourist rooming houses, hotels, and motels), public swimming pools and whirlpools, recreational/educational camps, restaurants, retail food facilities, and mobile food trucks. We have approximately 243 licensed facilities in Rusk County. Each facility under the contract is inspected at least once per licensing year, with additional inspections warranted by complaints or changes in ownership or capacity. DATCP administrative codes, including the Wisconsin Food Code, are used to evaluate health and safety principles. Common components of inspections are the availability of a safe water source, proper handling of wastewater, fire safety, infection control, safe food handling, and basic sanitation. We also have a contract with the Department of Public Instruction to inspect all school kitchens each year and to perform a second inspection reviewing each school's food safety plan.



2023 saw a lot of staff turnover in the department, and thus training of the new staff took precedence over completing inspections at all of our licensed facilities. The Covid-19 epidemic caused a decrease in inspection frequency, so we are working on getting back on track with routine inspections for all facilities.



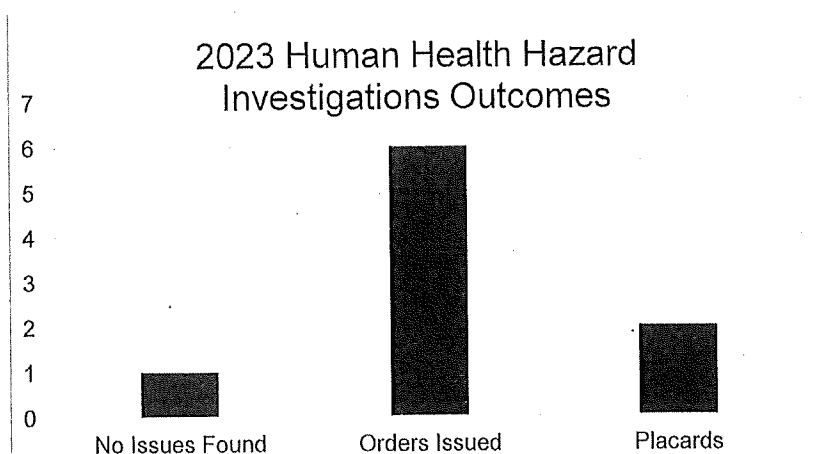
## 2023 Rusk County Lodging Inspections

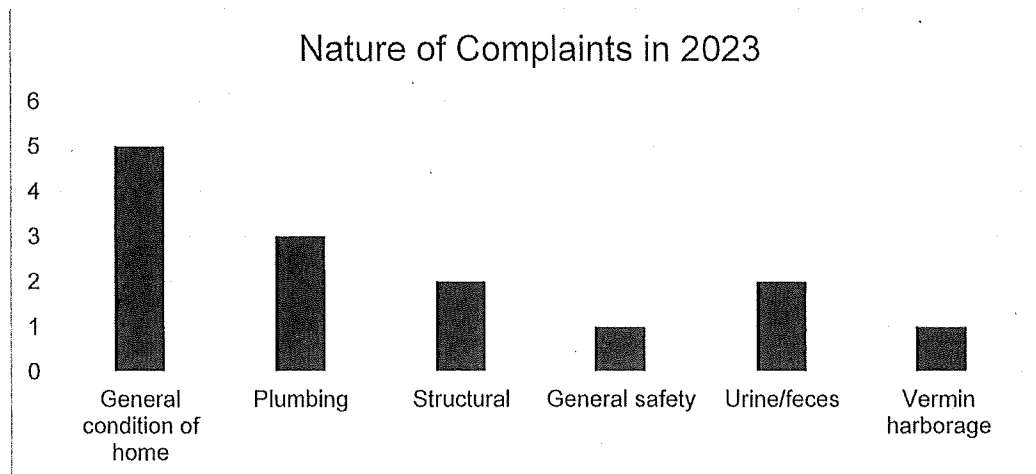


### Human Health Hazards

The Health Officer, or designee- often the Environmental Health Specialist, following Rusk County Code Chapter 30, investigates Human Health Hazard (HHH) complaints. A Human Health Hazard is any condition that is or may pose a serious threat to human health or safety. Collaborative relationships exist with other agencies including, but not limited to, Rusk County Zoning, Department of Natural Resources, Children & Family Services, Rusk County Sheriff’s Department, Ladysmith Police Department, Rusk County Animal Shelter, all townships and municipalities, and the Rusk County Corporation Counsel to investigate these complaints. Orders may be issued or the structure may be placarded as needed to protect the health and safety of the occupants and/or the public. In 2023, Public Health investigated nine Human Health Hazard Complaints.

### 2023 Human Health Hazard Investigations Outcomes





## Immunization Program

Immunizations are one of the best ways to protect our community from certain communicable diseases. Through the introduction of routine vaccinations many communicable diseases have become rare in the U.S. However, the viruses and bacteria that cause them still exist. Some diseases considered under control have re-emerged in recent years or are still seen on occasion. Rusk County Public Health provides immunizations to both adults and children.

### Children

Public health provides free vaccines to eligible children through the Wisconsin Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program. Children are eligible for VFC vaccines if they are enrolled in Medicaid, BadgerCare, have no health insurance, have health insurance that doesn't cover vaccines, or are American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Public Health nursing staff work with WIC staff to provide immunizations to children while they are here for WIC appointments. We also work with our public, private, and international schools in Rusk County in an effort to fully immunize students. We work closely with NCA nursing staff to vaccinate students who are not in compliance with the Wisconsin Student Immunization Law. We also offer home visits to our Amish community to provide immunizations.

Our immunization benchmark for 2023 was for children who are 24 months old and residing in Rusk County to be 66% compliant with completing the following recommended childhood immunizations:

- 4 doses of DTaP
- 3 doses of Polio
- 3 doses of Hepatitis B
- 3 doses of HIB

- 4 doses of Pneumococcal Conjugate
- 1 dose of MMR
- 1 dose of Varicella

Rusk County was 51% compliant with these vaccinations, which is a 3% increase from 2022. Quarterly reminders were mailed to families of children 24 months old who are not up to date with these vaccines.

#### 2023 School Influenza Immunizations

123 doses of influenza vaccines were given to students in our schools whose parents had signed for them to receive their flu shot.

- 40 children in Bruce
- 22 children in Flambeau
- 45 children in Ladysmith
- 16 children in OLS

Vaccine outreach activities included:

- Creating general VFC informational postcards that list vaccines we have available and who is eligible for vaccination at public health. These postcards were mailed to some residents who previously received vaccinations at Rusk County Public Health and were due for vaccinations
- Facebook posts with information from CDC on the importance of catching up on routine well child checkups and vaccinations after many children fell behind on these over the past few years

#### Adults

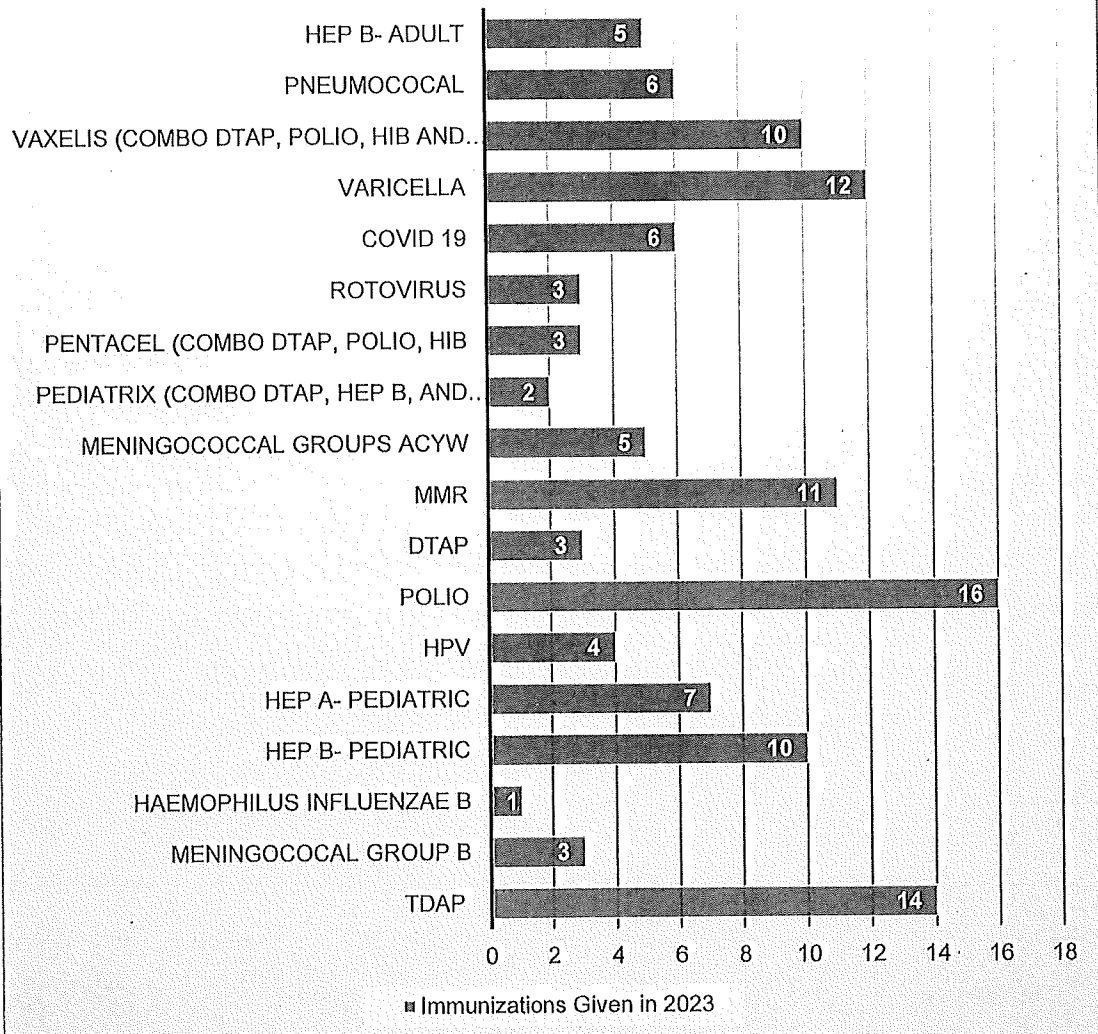
Tdap and influenza vaccines from the Wisconsin Vaccines for Adults (VFA) program are available at public health for adults without health insurance or who have health insurance that does not cover these vaccines. Rusk County Public Health also participates in the CDC Bridge Access Program which provides free COVID-19 vaccines to adults without health insurance or health insurance that does not cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccine. Hepatitis B vaccinations are privately purchased by public health and available to adults for a fee.

Forty-seven Rusk County employees and their dependents with insurance through the county received their flu shots. This was done at a Flu Shot day and also by appointment, and health insurance was billed.

The immunization program was inactive until the hiring of the health officer in May of 2023. For the remainder of the year, we gave 121 immunizations in office, besides yearly flu vaccines.



## Immunizations Given in 2023 (Excluding Flu Shots)



### Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Lead is a naturally occurring metal and there are many sources of lead in the environment that can harm health. Children are most at risk for exposure to lead-based paint found in homes built before 1978. Adults can also be harmed by lead poisoning. Lead exposure can cause serious health issues such as learning disabilities, developmental delays, and other health and behavior concerns.

Public Health receives notification anytime a child residing in the county has a blood lead level over 3 mcg/dL. Rusk County Public Health works to provide information and resources to families who have a child with elevated blood lead results through mailings, phone calls, or in person visits. Developmental screening of the child can be done by public health or the child can be referred to Birth to 3 or their primary provider for developmental screening and continued support. If a child's blood lead result is above 15 mcg/dL public health will help arrange a home/environmental assessment by a certified lead risk assessor through the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

In 2023, there were three confirmed elevated lead cases in Rusk County. Confirmation is achieved when an elevated capillary draw receives a venous draw that is also elevated or a venous draw is performed by a doctors' office. These cases were followed up on by Public Health staff and efforts were made to assist families with remediation of the lead source.

## **Maternal Child Health (MCH)**

MCH programs help to improve the health of mothers, children, and families. Program activities in 2023 include Cribs for Kids infant safe sleep program, Healthy Beginnings, postpartum and newborn support, lead poisoning and prevention, and Breastfeeding Friendly Child Care Recognition. Public health also made updates to our MCH webpage in 2023.

### **Cribs for Kids**

Cribs for Kids is an infant safe sleep education program for parents, families, and caregivers with the goal of helping to reduce the risk of injury and death of infants related to unsafe sleep environments. Parents and caregivers participating in the program will meet with a nurse and education on infant safe sleep practices is provided. New, portable or "Pack n' Play" cribs are also provided and the recipient is instructed on use. This program is available to expectant parents during the third trimester of pregnancy and parents or caregivers with a child under age one year old.

Program information is communicated on our website and through Facebook posts. October is SIDS awareness month and Facebook posts with safe sleep recommendations and Cribs for Kids information is specifically shared during this month. Most referrals for this program come from our WIC program but others can refer, or individuals can self-refer. Six Pack n' Play cribs were distributed in 2023. Rusk County experienced 2 infant deaths in 2023. In October 2023 Rusk County Public Health met with a group of individuals and community partners in Rusk County to discuss this concern and share information on resources available to parents and caregivers to promote infant safe sleep practices.

### **Healthy Beginnings**

Rusk County provides a prenatal care program called Healthy Beginnings (previously called Prenatal Care Coordination/Healthy Beginnings+). Healthy Beginnings provides support and education to moms and families during pregnancy and after birth of their baby. Supporting and educating mothers and families during pregnancy helps to promote a healthy pregnancy and birth outcome. Participants meet with a nurse throughout their pregnancy and for at least one postpartum visit. These visits occur at the public health office or in the client's home. Education and support provided is based on the individuals needs and can include normal pregnancy changes, pregnancy problems, labor and delivery, infant care and feeding, postpartum care, perinatal depression/mental health concerns, and tobacco or substance use reduction. Four clients received Healthy Beginnings services in 2023 and interpreter services were needed for two of these clients.

### **Postpartum and Newborn Support**

This service provides a visit with a nurse for support and education for postpartum families and newborns, answers common questions new parents have, provides weight checks for newborns, offers perinatal depression screening, and assists in connections to needed resources.

### **Breastfeeding Friendly Recognition**

Rusk County Public Health supports and assists licensed/certified child care sites in becoming breastfeeding friendly. Participants receive support to improve their practices, policies, and child care environments to better support nursing families. Facilities undergo assessments, create action plans, and receive technical assistance to make needed improvements. Once the 10 Steps to being breastfeeding friendly are met, participants are awarded and recognized as Breastfeeding Friendly. This recognition is reviewed and renewed every two years. Rusk County currently has two child care centers that have been recognized as Breastfeeding Friendly. Outreach was given to eligible child care centers and one additional center expressed interest however they chose not to complete of the needed steps for this recognition.

### **Narcan Direct Program**

In 2023, Rusk County Public Health worked to increase access to Narcan in the community. Narcan is a nasal spray that can be used to reverse an overdose to opioids such as oxycodone, morphine, or fentanyl. Overdoses can occur for a variety of reasons and may be from injection, ingestion, snorting or through contact with mucous membranes, such as contact on your hands and then rubbing your nose or mouth. Public Health has obtained grant funding to provide training to community members. In 2023, 130 people were trained. Groups trained were interested government center employees, community groups and volunteers, fire departments, community partners, and anyone who was interested. This training is important because it can literally save a life.

Public Health also received grant funding to install a Narcan Box in the west entrance of the government center (near the law enforcement conference room). This is available to anyone in the public who would like access to Narcan. It can be taken anonymously, and when the Narcan Box door is opened an alert is sent to the Health Officer so that the box can be checked and restocked if needed.

## **Public Health Preparedness Program**

Rusk County Public Health is part of the Western Wisconsin Public Health Readiness Consortium (WWPHRC). The WWPHRC is a consortium made up of twenty-two counties in the west and northwest of Wisconsin who pool resources and work together to ensure departments are prepared for future threats both large and small. This could be things related to bioterrorism, infectious disease, severe weather, natural or manmade disasters. The WWPHRC works to ensure that plans and systems are in place so local public health departments can respond appropriately. We do this through regularly reviewing our Public Health Emergency Plan (PHEP), holding table top exercises, coordinating with local emergency management, and working with local community partners in an effort to be prepared for whatever situation may present itself.

We participated in the "Fight the Bite" campaign, which is a program to raise awareness about tick and mosquito borne illness. We did this by visiting county campgrounds and area parks and recreation areas and living information about tick removal, as well as kits to assist with safe tick removal, and providing insect repellent spray and wipes.

## **Reproductive Health Program**

Rusk County's reproductive health program helps provide family planning services including access to contraceptives, testing for sexually transmitted infections and treatment if necessary, pregnancy testing, and assistance with family planning through things like education and helping participants think about their own plan for when they would like to start or expand their family.

The reproductive health program dispensed supplies 327 times in 2023. We pride ourselves on being approachable and available for our clients. We also introduced the Visby PCR test which allows in office testing of female clients for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis. If clients choose the Visby testing, we can have results within 28 minutes. We still utilize the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene for our male clients and those that prefer this form of testing. If clients test positive for one of these STIs, we can provide antibiotics to the client as well as medication to any partners who may have had exposure.

## School Nurse

School nursing services are provided to the Bruce School District on a contractual basis. The school Registered Nurse (RN) coordinates health services for students within the school district and ensures that health services comply with federal and state laws and standards.

Services provided include:

- Assessment, first aid, and care of sick and injured students and staff.
- Maintaining health and medical documentation for students.
- Medication training and skill verification of school staff that perform medication administration in the absence of the nurse. This training and skill verification must meet the requirements of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Training typically includes emergency epinephrine, emergency seizure medication, emergency diabetic medication, inhalers, and medications given by oral, eye, ear, and topical routes.
- Management of student chronic health conditions such as Type I Diabetes, seizure disorders, allergies with anaphylaxis, ADHD, asthma, etc. within the school setting and development of Individual Health Plans (IHP) for students with these conditions.
- Management of student medication administration at school including medication orders from medical providers for administration of prescription medications to students at school.
- Immunization tracking, reporting, and legal notification to parents/guardians under the Wisconsin Student Immunization Law.
- Complete and coordinate insurance accident claims for student injuries occurring at school or school sponsored events.
- Completing vision and hearing screening for students.
- Assisting in the prevention and control of communicable diseases.
- Providing health education and promotion information to students, staff, and families including annual puberty education to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- *Order* and inventory of supplies, materials and equipment needed for school health services.

During the 2022-2023 school year there were 4,368 student health office visits, this does not include visits for administration of daily prescription medication to students.

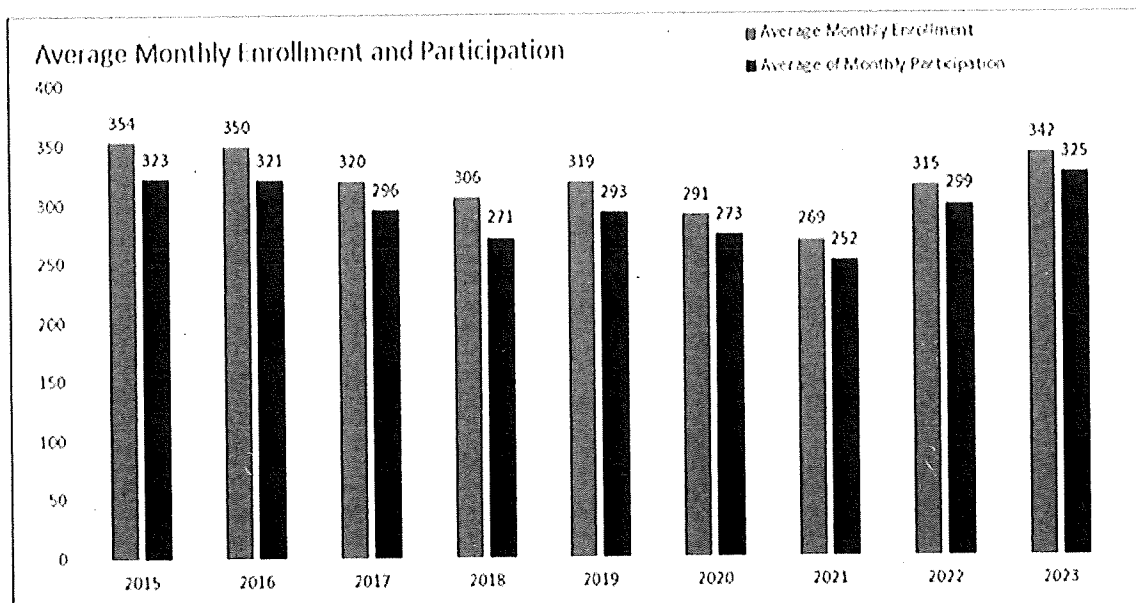
## Women Infant and Children (WIC) Program

WIC results in overall positive health outcomes including healthier pregnancies, healthier birth outcomes, better growth and development of young children, and improved health status of participants. Greater than 50% of the infants born in the United State participate in WIC. **For every \$1.00 spent on WIC during pregnancy, up to \$4.21 is saved in medical costs.** Everyone wins with WIC. Moms eat healthier and have healthier babies. Infants born to WIC moms grow and develop better. WIC kids eat more nutritious foods and are better prepared for school. Plus, the WIC food benefits card and shopping app make WIC easier to use than ever

WIC participants must purchase the foods that are listed on their food prescriptions (packages), which are healthy foods designed to meet the nutritional needs of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and their young children. **In 2023, greater than \$240,000 in healthy foods were purchased in Rusk County with WIC benefits.**

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole-grain breads, tortillas, brown rice, and pasta
- Cereal
- Milk
- Cheese, yogurt, and tofu
- Eggs, beans, and peas
- Peanut butter
- 100% Fruit juice
- Baby foods
- Some infant formula, if needed

### WIC Participation Over the Years in Rusk County





Food

Explore

Resources



welcome to  
**one**<sup>®</sup>  
Online Nutrition Education  
from the Department of Health

Use ONE to get trusted  
nutrition, health and  
cooking tips.

*Click to learn how!*



### Areas of focus in 2023

In 2023, the state of emergency related to COVID be de-escalated for the first time in nearly 4 years. With this, there was change in policy to ensure that WIC programs re-opened clinic for in-person services once again. Rusk County WIC had been offering in-person since the fall of 2022, as desired by some participants.

In 2023, there was further guidance to obtain anthropometric and bloodwork data either in-person or from the physician. With this requirement, we have seen even more participants returning to office for their recertification and mid-cert appointments. WIC staff does offer to help the family obtain this information from their physician if that is their choice. It has been great to be seeing people in person again.

In 2023, Rusk County participated in a study for the ONE nutrition education system. In the study, Rusk County was a control group. But since Rusk County participated, we have received early access to using the ONE system with our families and started doing so in the

spring/summer of 2023. The rest of the state has begun rolling that out in early 2024. We are glad to be able to use the ONE system as a tool to aid us in providing first-rate nutrition counselling and education.

WIC staff also worked together to build our Milk Way Breastfeeding Rock Stars wall. This serves as a promotion of breastfeeding for anyone traveling through the WIC public health area. It is simply beautiful and inspiring.

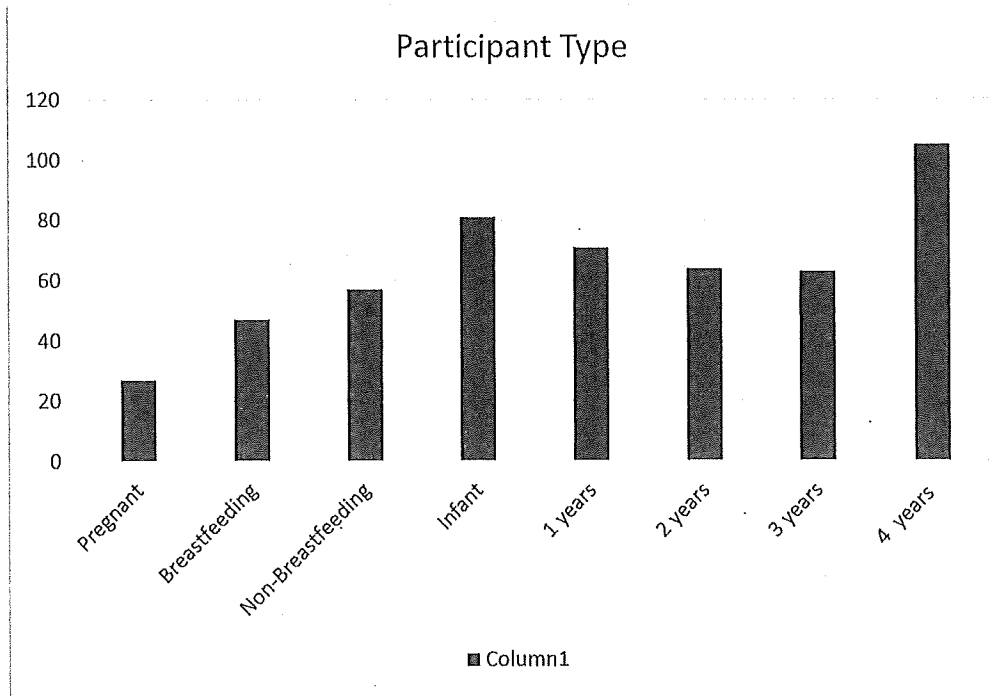


One mom wrote, "Breastfeeding has helped create a great bond between me and my children. As I reach the 6-month mark with my son, I am thankful I can still fully provide nutrients to him with my body. Women's bodies can do amazing things."

Another, "I breastfeed because it's the most customized food for my son. The added help for his immune system also gives me comfort during this time of such nasty germs going around. I also love how strong our bond is because of breastfeeding."

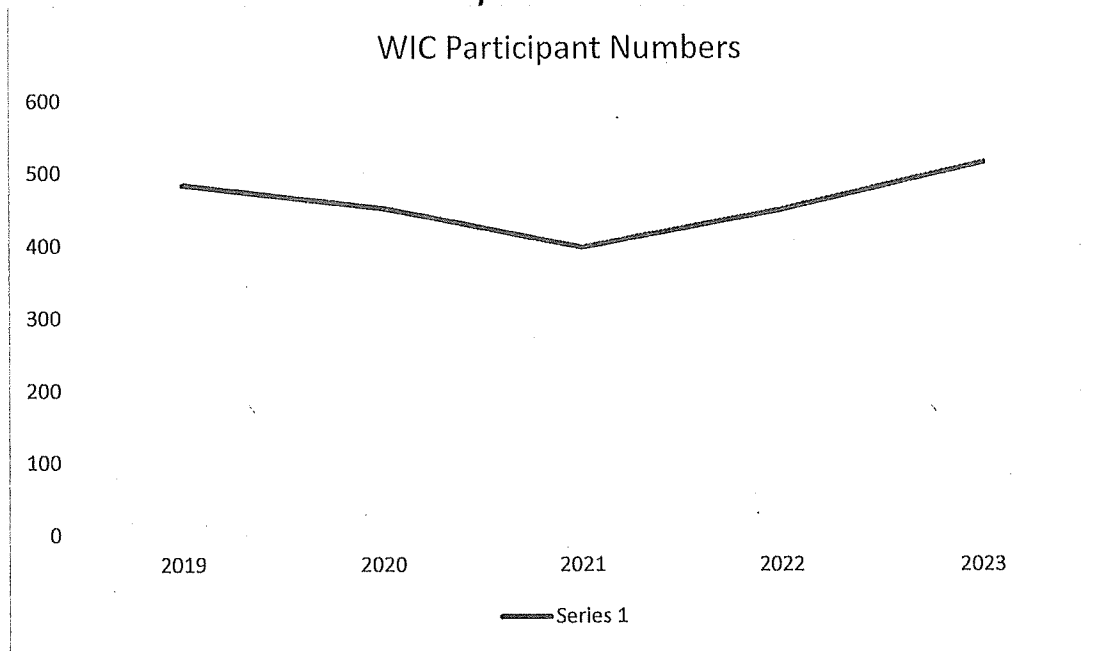
**Participation in 2023**

In Rusk County 515 persons participated in WIC in 2023; children 303, pregnant women 27, breastfeeding women 47, non-breastfeeding woman 57, infants 81.



**Participation 2019-2023**

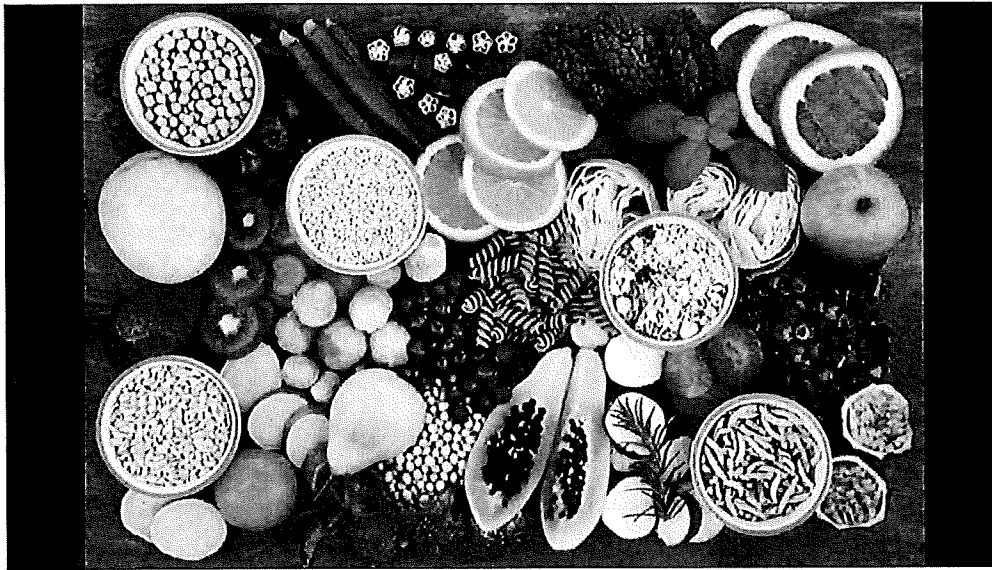
WIC Participant Numbers





**Nutrition Education**

Nutrition Education and counseling are an important service of the WIC program. In 2023, 3,145 education contacts were made during Rusk County WIC appointments on a variety of topics. Some of the common topics covered include; bottle weaning, breastfeeding support, cup use with toddlers, picky eating, increasing variety of fruits and vegetables, and high iron foods.



**Breastfeeding**

In Rusk County, the registered dietitian, the breastfeeding expert and breastfeeding peer counselor provide unique breastfeeding education and support. It has been estimated that \$13 billion per year could be saved if 90% of US infants were breastfed exclusively for six months.

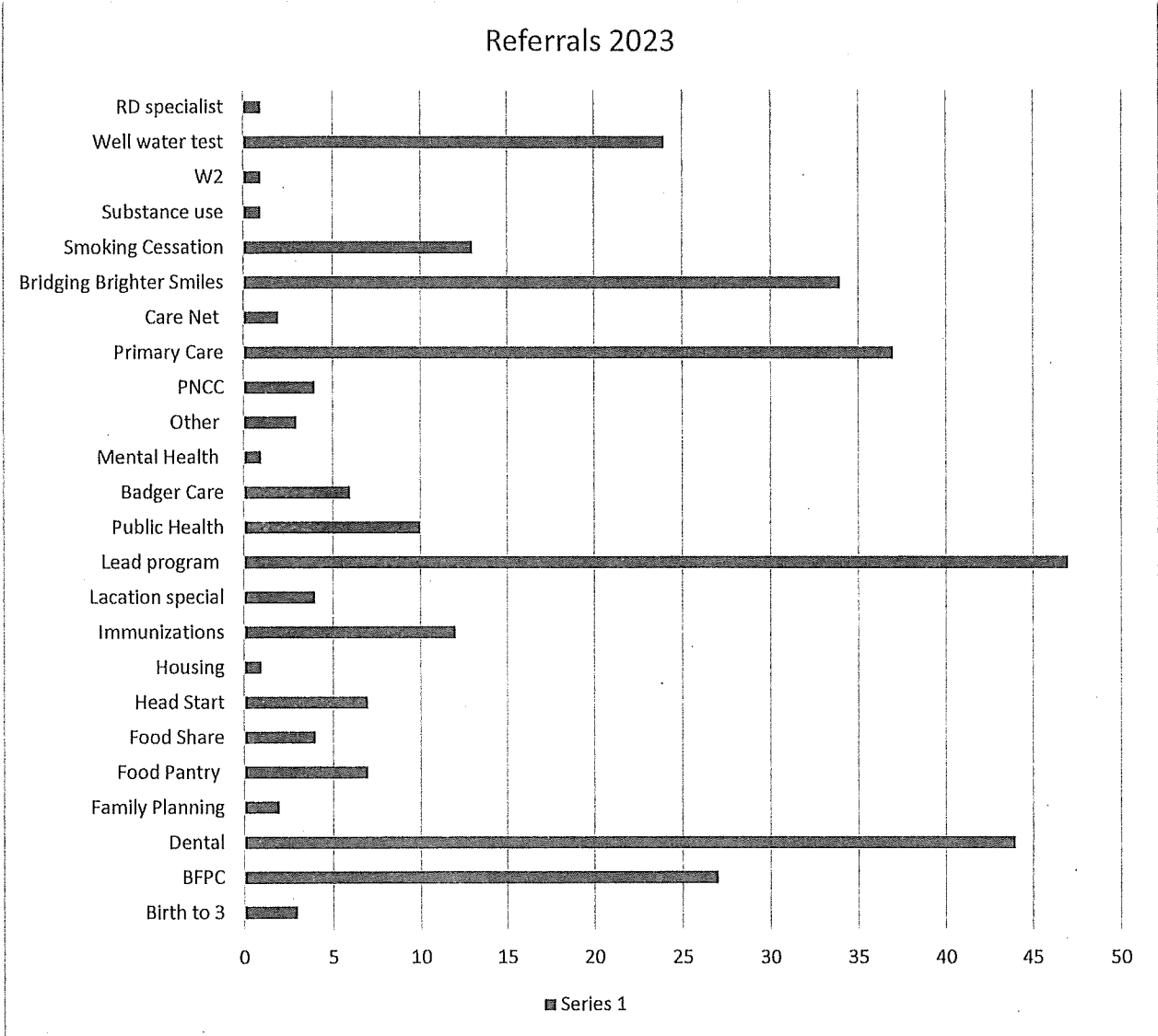


Our breastfeeding peer counselor (BFPC) is someone with lived experience as a breastfeeding mom who works with WIC breastfeeding moms by providing outreach, support, and a listening ear. The BFPC does this by being available via voice call, text message, or for in person meetings. They are often available outside normal business hours to be a listening ear and an encouraging voice for moms that may be feeling discouraged or have questions. And, if there is a problem outside their scope of work, they can refer to our CPA, who is an International Breastfeeding Certified Lactation Consult and available to provider further help and assistance.

	<i>Rusk County</i>	<i>Statewide</i>
<i>Initiation at birth</i>	78.9%	75.4%
<i>1 month</i>	88.3%	80.5%
<i>3 months</i>	71.0%	64.9%
<i>6 months</i>	42.5%	44.8%
<i>1 year</i>	22%	23%

## Referrals

WIC is a gateway to health care and social services for many families. Rusk County WIC made 291 referrals in 2023. Internal referrals include working closely with the public health nursing to ensure continuation of services to reproductive health, immunizations, healthy beginnings, dental cleanings and screenings and well water testing. It is important to ensure that clients have ready access to contraceptive services prior to delivery.

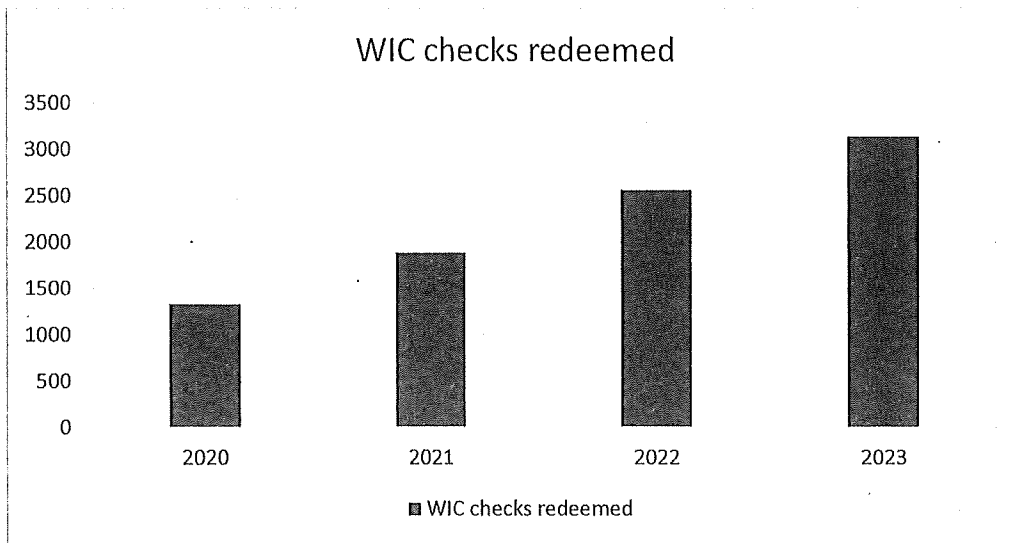


### ***Lead Program***

WIC staff are also trained to operate the early childhood lead poisoning prevention program under the direction of the health officer. A total of 85 blood lead tests were completed at WIC in 2023. Of these, 11 children were referred to the physician for follow for elevated lead test results. Lead is very detrimental to a child's development so it is recommended that children are tested at 1 years old and again 1 year later.

### ***Farmer's Market Nutrition Program***

WIC families receive vouchers to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs at the Rusk County Farmers' Market, or any surrounding Wisconsin county. In 2023, \$7,080 in checks was issued in farmers market checks. Redemption of farmer's market check has increased over the last few years from \$1,332 in 2020 to \$3,138 in 2023. WIC continues to work with the market manager for opportunities to increase redemption of the Farmer's Market checks. Each participant can receive a booklet of \$30.00 to use at the Farmer's market.



## Looking Ahead to 2024

So where is Rusk County Public Health headed in 2024? We are looking at ways to increase outreach in the community. We've already starting working at rebuilding our partnerships and coalitions and are working at forming new ones.

Our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Committee will be meeting monthly and will be looking at ways to improve the physical activity of our community as well as mental health resiliency. We are excited to see what we can accomplish over the next few years in this area.

We continue to partner with community groups we are a part of to leverage our collective knowledge and skills for our community. All our community groups are working on exciting projects to bring more resources and services to our county and we are excited to see what progress can be made in the coming year.

We invite you to follow us on social media at <https://www.facebook.com/ruskcountypublichealth> where we regularly share updates on issues that can affect the health of community, community resources available, and information about projects we are working on. For more information about services provided at Public Health, you can visit our webpage at <https://ruskcounty.org/publichealth> or call Public Health at 715/532-2299.