

Karen's Corner



Working to Improve Foster Care

West Virginia has approximately 4,000 children in foster care at any given time. These children are placed in our custody when parents or guardians are unable to provide appropriate care.

It is challenging to meet the complex needs of our foster care children, and I am extremely pleased that West Virginia is one of seven states selected by the National Governor's Association (NGA) to participate in an institute to improve the social and emotional well-being of children in foster care. The institute is called "Three Branch" as it will focus on an integrated and comprehensive approach that aligns the work of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government.

By working with other states in the NGA Three Branch Institute on Child Social and Emotional Wellbeing, we will be able to better identify gaps or barriers in policies and highlight best or promising practices.

We have many talented DHHR employees serving on and leading Three Branch workgroups and I am thankful for their knowledge, dedication and compassion. The workgroups will examine issues including health screening (medical, behavioral health and trauma), capacity and access for mental and behavioral health care services, appropriate use of medications, out of home placements and reduction of drug addicted infants placed in out-of-home care.

Our work plan is aggressive and includes short and long term goals. I look forward to sharing the successes of this workgroup with you and the positive changes it brings for the children of West Virginia entrusted in our care.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen L. Bowling".

Karen L. Bowling, Cabinet Secretary

Information on Frequency of Pay for State Employees

Reprinted with permission from the June 2013 wvOASIS newsletter

After endorsement from the West Virginia Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Steering Committee, the ERP Board voted to increase the frequency of State Employee pay from semi-monthly to bi-weekly starting in January 2015. Currently, the State of West Virginia pays all employees in 24 pay cycles (2 per month) with a variable number of days in each pay cycle. Beginning January 2015, state employees will be paid over 26 pay cycles, or bi-weekly.

"The goal of the wvOASIS Project is to improve business processes across the state," Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin said. "The area that provides the greatest opportunity for improvement is the standardization of pay across state government. Bi-weekly pay provides employees consistent and predictable paydays every other Friday."

Having the same number of days and hours in each pay cycle produces multiple operational benefits for West Virginia. This new process will make it easier to calculate regular pay, overtime pay, termination pay, separation payment for annual leave, leave without pay and other leave balances. Informal polls conducted among state employees showed overwhelming support to move to a bi-weekly pay method.

"Public employees are excited about getting paid every other Friday," State Auditor Glen B. Gainer said. "At the annual WVDOT Finance Conference, state workers expressed relief from having to stretch paychecks over three weekends." The paycheck itself will be slightly different compared to their current paychecks as their annual salary will be spread across 26 pay periods instead of 24.

"It's very important to note that this decision will not impact the annualized salaries of state employees," stated State Treasurer John D. Perdue. "Employees soon will realize the benefit of being paid every other Friday. More frequent and consistent payments will help employees from a financial planning perspective."

For more information, visit wvoasis.gov or email questions to enterprisereadiness@wvoasis.gov



Protect You and Your Family With Flu Shots



DHHR is reminding West Virginia residents that now is the time to be vaccinated against seasonal flu as winter approaches. Approximately 5-20% of U.S. residents get the flu each year contributing to as many as 200,000 hospitalizations and thousands of deaths in a severe flu season. Seasonal flu is unpredictable but historically peaks in West Virginia in January or February of each year.

“The flu is highly contagious,” said Dr. Letitia Tierney, Commissioner for the Bureau for Public Health and State Health Officer. “Adults and children should consider getting the flu vaccine to help protect themselves from catching the flu. It takes about two weeks after vaccination to provide protection against the flu. In the meantime, you are still at risk for getting the flu. That’s why it is better to get vaccinated early in the fall, before the flu season gets under way.”

Tierney said most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to five-to-seven days after symptoms develop. “Some people believe that by getting the flu shot, they will become sick but that is not the case,” said Tierney. “Let me be clear, it’s impossible to get the flu from the flu shot, because it’s a killed virus.”

Flu vaccine is available in the traditional flu shot that is approved for anyone 6 months of age and older. Residents should talk to their health care provider about flu vaccination concerns if they have a severe allergy to chicken eggs, a history of severe reaction to a flu vaccination, a moderate-to-severe illness with a fever or a history of Guillain–Barré Syndrome (a severe paralytic illness, also called GBS).

Residents Should Prepare Now for Colder Temperatures

As colder temperatures return to West Virginia, Department of Health and Human Resources Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling and Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary Joseph C. Thornton remind residents to schedule a professional inspection of all fuel-burning heating systems, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, wood stoves, water heaters, chimneys, flues and vents to help reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and structure fires.

“The best way to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning is to have a professional inspection every year and install working carbon monoxide alarms in your home,” Bowling said. “Additionally, if residents smell gas inside or outside their homes, they should immediately call their local gas company.”

Common home heating safety tips include:



Fireplaces: Have flues and chimneys inspected before each heating season for leakage and blockage by creosote or debris. Open the fireplace damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. Never close the damper if the ashes are still warm. An open damper may help prevent build-up of poisonous gases inside the home. Store fireplace

ashes in a fire resistant container and cover it with a lid. Keep the container outdoors and away from combustibles.

Space heaters: Use a space heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features; older space heaters may not meet the newer safety standards. An unvented gas space heater that meets current safety standards will shut off if oxygen levels fall too low. Place the heater on a level, hard and nonflammable surface (such as ceramic tile floor), not on rugs or carpets or near

bedding or drapes. Keep the heater at least three feet from bedding, drapes, furniture and other flammable materials. Keep children and pets away from space heaters. To prevent the risk of fire, NEVER leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or place heater close to any sleeping person. Turn the space heater off if you leave the area.



Charcoal grills: Never burn charcoal inside of homes, vehicles, tents, or campers. Charcoal should never be used indoors, even if ventilation is provided.

Smoke detectors can also protect loved ones and save lives. Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of a home, particularly outside bedrooms and preferably inside them as well. State law requires that all property owners have working smoke alarms near sleeping areas.

Smoke alarms should be tested monthly, and their batteries replaced annually. The absence of smoke alarms, or detectors with their batteries removed, is a recurring factor in residential fires, according to the Office of the State Fire Marshal, which is part of the Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety.

“A helpful habit is replacing alarm batteries when you turn back your clocks for the end of Daylight Savings Time,” said Thornton.

Learn more about winter heating safety at www.cdc.gov/nceh/pressroom/2006/cowarning.htm or call your local health department. Learn more about fire safety from the Office of the State Fire Marshal at www.firemarshal.wv.gov or from the National Fire Protection Association at www.nfpa.org.