



Douglas County Health Department

Newsletter

January - March 2026

Our Vision

Our vision is to nurture a supportive, safe, and inclusive environment that encourages all individuals to achieve their optimal physical and mental well-being.

Our Mission

The Douglas County Health Department will serve, monitor, and seek to improve the health of its residents through health promotion, education, and proactive communication to ensure overall community well-being.

★Hot Topic★

The significant growth of Alpha Gal cases has become a growing public health concern in our community as well as nationwide. This condition results in a red meat allergy for individuals bitten by the Lone Star Tick. Please see inside for additional information regarding this issue.





Meet Our New Administrator

Following the retirement notice of current Administrator Valerie Reese, the Douglas County Health Department Board of Trustees hired Elizabeth Hull as the new Administrator, effective January 1, 2026.

Elizabeth brings a wealth of experience to this role, having served the agency in multiple capacities over the last 10 years, most recently as Assistant Administrator.

Elizabeth stated "I want to express my sincere thanks for the opportunity to serve Douglas County in this capacity. This county holds a special place in my heart, and I am committed to its welfare. I was born at the old hospital in Mansfield and I love living in the country. I enjoy watching football, cozy mysteries and fishing! I look forward to working closely with all our partners and citizens to preserve the things we cherish most and to continue improving the health of our county."



Public Health Nurses

Public health nurses play a critical role in community well-being by focusing on population health, disease prevention, and wellness. By addressing health issues where people live, work, and play, they combine clinical nursing skills with social sciences to advocate for better health outcomes. Their work includes managing immunization programs, educating the public, and preparing for emergencies across schools, health departments, and community clinics.

At the Douglas County Health Department, our two public health nurses are vital to both our agency and the community. They consistently collect and analyze data to monitor disease trends and identify potential outbreaks. As frontline responders, they investigate cases and determine exposure levels to effectively reduce the spread of disease.

In addition to outbreak response, our nurses prioritize prevention through regular immunization clinics. They also host monthly and quarterly health fairs providing essential screenings for blood pressure, A1C, and cholesterol.

For more information on the services our nurses can offer please contact our office at (417) 683-4174 and ask to speak to Brandy or Kathy.

Alpha Gal Syndrome

An allergy to “Alpha-gal” refers to having a severe and potentially life-threatening allergy to a carbohydrate molecule called galactose-alpha-1,3-galactose that is found in most mammalian or “red meat.” Unlike other food allergies, which typically occur within minutes of ingestion, symptoms from eating red meat such as pork, lamb, or beef may be delayed, occurring 3-8 hours after eating. Most food allergies are directed against a protein molecule, but alpha-gal is unusual because it is a carbohydrate, and a delay in its absorption may explain the delay in symptoms.

Symptoms

As with other food allergies, signs or symptoms may include:

- Hives and Itching
- Swelling of your lips, face, or eyelids
- Shortness of breath, cough, or wheezing
- Abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, or vomiting

The most severe reaction, anaphylaxis, can present as a combination of several of these symptoms, may include low blood pressure, and is potentially fatal.

Because these symptoms are delayed, you may only wake up with them in the middle of the night after dinner.



Alpha Gal and Medications

Some medications may contain small amounts of alpha gal containing additives, stabilizers, or coatings. Ingredients that may contain alpha gal include, but are not limited to:

- Gelatin
- Glycerin
- Magnesium stearate
- Bovine extract

Preventing Alpha Gal

Because this allergy is predominantly tick borne it is important to prevent tick bites when you are outside and in areas that are prone to ticks. Take the following measures to prevent tick bites:

- Use EPA approved repellents
- Wear light colored long sleeve and long pants clothing to spot ticks easily
- Stay on trails. Walk in center of trails, avoiding tall grass

In Summary

Alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) doesn't develop immediately after a tick bite; it typically takes weeks to months for the body to become sensitized, with the first reactions appearing anywhere from a few weeks to several months (even up to a year) after the initial tick bite. This significant delay between bite and reaction, plus the delayed symptom onset after meat, makes AGS hard to diagnose, as people don't connect the past tick bite to the later food allergy. Contact your healthcare provider if you think you might have alpha gal.

Community Cares/Behavior Health

Through funding provided by the Missouri Foundation for Health, we aim to build a coordinated, trauma-informed system of care that supports individuals with substance use and mental health challenges, as well as their caregivers, first responders and professionals who serve them.

Previously convened focus groups highlighted several challenges that hinder prevention efforts and contribute to untreated behavioral health conditions. Plans to address these challenges, include, but are not limited to:

- Implementing a referral system to ensure individuals receive appropriate care.
- Offering case management services to coordinate support and resources for those in need.
- Providing stipends for Peer Support Specialist sessions, encouraging participation and access to peer-led recovery support.
- Training First Responder Peer Support Specialist to assist first responders in managing occupational stress and supporting their mental well-being.
- Holding focus groups with first responders, law enforcement, and mental health workers to gather input and foster collaboration across sectors.
- Forming two councils comprised of (1) individuals with lived experiences and (2) recovery leaders to guide program development.

For more information on this program please contact our office at (417) 683-4174 and ask to speak to Sonya.



Key Observances

January

- Cervical Health Awareness Month
- National Blood Donor Month
- Mental Wellness Month
- Thyroid Awareness Month

February

- American Heart Month
- National Cancer Prevention Month
- National Children's Dental Health

March

- Brain Injury Awareness Month
- National Nutrition Month
- Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month
- Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
- National Kidney Month