

## Letter from the Assistant Secretary

As the trees are turning and the weather is getting colder, we are reminded that flu season is here. Flu season means we are more likely to catch and spread disease.



The Department of Health is on the front line of educating people about how to protect themselves from getting the flu. We have a number of resources to help you fight the flu. Our agency [Internet](#) has several valuable Web pages about protecting your patients, your family and yourself.

[Flu News](#) is a good place to start. It has vaccination information and fact sheets on other flu-related information.

With the reopening of schools, we expect a resurgence of the new strain of [H1N1](#) that emerged in the spring. Our Secretary of Health Mary Selecky has dedicated agency resources to fight this virus, also known as swine flu. The swine flu became an epidemic in the spring and was later declared a pandemic. We want to make sure all of you are prepared to help reduce the spread of swine flu as well as seasonal influenza.

We have set up a convenient Web site for health professionals to [pre-register](#) to distribute the new H1N1 vaccine when it's available. This vaccine is expected to be ready this fall. We encourage all professionals who provide vaccines to sign up for this. Those of you who are already get state supplied vaccine for children are automatically pre-registered for the swine flu vaccine.

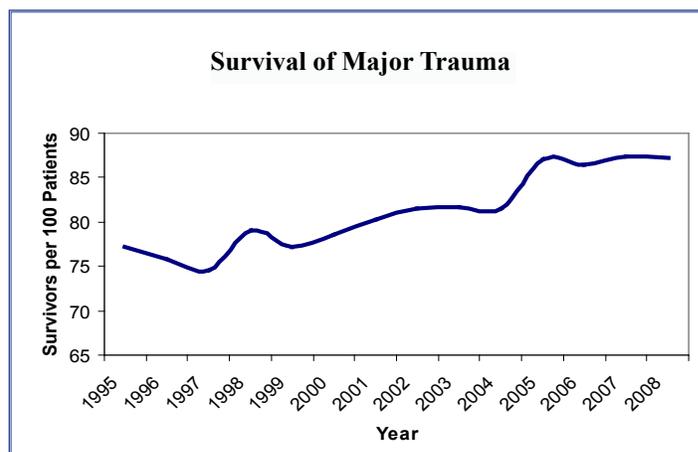
[West Nile Virus](#) has also been detected in our state. As I write this, we have one confirmed human infection. Several other suspected cases are being tested. We have a great Web site dedicated to understanding the virus and learning how to protect yourself.

Remember, as providers and members of the health care community, you have the power to protect your health and improve the health of patients in Washington State. Get vaccinated and offer vaccines to all your patients.

*Karen Jensen*

Karen Ann Jensen, Assistant Secretary  
Health Systems Quality Assurance  
Washington Department of Health

## Featured Performance Measure



**Trauma System Saves Lives** - The lives of an estimated 2,300 people who were not expected to survive their injuries have been saved since 1995 as a result of improvements in the [state's trauma system](#). We have seen a steady increase in the percentage of patients who survive major traumas. Our goal by mid-2011 is to have 88.5 percent of major trauma patients survive. We are reaching this goal by planning and coordinating our resources and services. This gets trauma patients to the right care in time to save lives. For a person with a life-threatening injury, time is critical.

## Program Updates

**Nearly 200 Ambulatory Surgery Facilities Licensed under New Law** - Our state has new rules requiring licenses for ambulatory surgery facilities. ([RCW 70.230](#)) The bill behind the rules is [ESHB 1414](#). It became effective July 1. As of early August, we had licensed 194 facilities. We also issued 13 temporary licensees. A facility must get a license if it uses general anesthesia. For more information, contact Byron Plan at 360-236-2916 or Susan Boyer at 360-236-4853.

**EMS Application Process** - We are streamlining our process for EMS applicants. We no longer request the signatures of their sponsoring EMS agency or the medical program director in advance. We will accept them later in the process. This allows us to enter the applications in our system and begin [background checks](#). We will not issue the license until we receive the signatures and all other licensing requirements are met.

## Updates (continued)

**Opioid Use and Misuse on the Rise** - As the use of prescription [opioid](#) pain medication increases, so do unintended consequences. This includes an increase in unintentional overdose deaths and hospitalizations. We have also seen an increase in people receiving state-funded substance abuse treatment for addiction to prescription opioid medication. In June 2008 we started a quarterly workgroup to increase communication and collaboration between state agencies and external partners. The workgroup also looks at short-term actions. We now have several subcommittees working on emergency department issues, provider, public and patient education.

**New Rule on Acute Care Beds Underway** - We have started to update how we calculate the need for acute care beds. This is a step in our [Certificate of Need](#) quality improvement process that began in the summer of 2007. We expect the rules to attract a lot of provider interest and participation. The goal is to have standards and calculation methods that reflect best practices and provide clear guidance for applicants and reviewers. This ensures consistency, predictability and fairness in Certificate of Need decisions. If you would like to participate, contact John Hilger at 360-236-2929.

**Injuries from Falls can be Prevented** - About one-third of people age 65 and older each year suffer from a fall. In Washington, it is the leading cause of injury-related hospitalization for this age group. Falls cause more than five times as many hospitalizations as motor vehicle occupant injuries for all ages combined. We are working with community organizations to get the word out that falls are not a normal part of aging. We created an exercise and education program titled "[Stay Active & Independent for Life.](#)" Many falls are preventable, and older people who have fallen are at very high risk of falling again. They should receive an assessment of their fall risk factors by a trained professional. Exercise, with a focus on strength and balance, is the single most effective preventive measure for reducing the chances of falling.

## HSQA Internet Portal

We hope this newsletter is helping keep you up-to-date with the activities in our division. We look forward to sending this out each quarter and getting your feedback. If you would like more information or would like to stay updated on our activities between newsletters, the [HSQA portal](#) of the agency [Internet](#) is a good resource. One of our goals is to be timely and have the information you need. The right column on our Internet site is dedicated to updates and activities. We keep the topics current and add links to new or updated publications. We regularly update the information on our Web site so you can stay current with division activities. As we mentioned in the last newsletter, we are revising our Web pages to better serve you. Please check out our Web site and [let us know](#) what you think.

## Legislation Implementation

**Late Responses will Prompt Fines** - [State law](#) has given us the authority to fine a health care provider who fails to produce documents during an investigation. It encourages providers to respond to requests quickly. Providers have 21 days after a request to produce requested items. They may ask for more time to respond. We will extend deadlines for good cause. The law gives us the authority to issue a fine of \$100 a day with a maximum fine of \$5000 if the provider fails to provide the items by the deadline.

**New Counselor Credentials Issued** - On July 1, we began accepting applications for eight new [counseling professions](#). These replace the former registered counselor credential. Current [registered counselors](#) have one year to transition to a new credential. As of mid-August, we had received 276 applications and issued 58 credentials.

**Restroom Access Expanded** - [State law](#) now allows customers with eligible medical conditions to use employee restrooms in retail establishments. The medical condition must be verified by the customer's health care provider. We have a form for eligible customers. The [form](#) is available on our [Web site](#) along with additional information about the law.

**New Plan to Improve Oral Health** - The department's [Oral Health Program](#) is developing the first oral health plan for our state. Oral diseases, such as tooth decay, are still very common among all age groups. The plan will develop solutions to improve oral health. The program invited the [Dental Quality Assurance Commission](#), [Dental Hygiene Examining Committee](#), [Board of Denturists](#), [Medical Quality Assurance Commission](#) and [Board of Pharmacy](#) to make suggestions for the plan. You can find information on preventing oral diseases, finding dental care and learning about the oral health needs of our state on the oral health Web site.

## Notice

**Annual Associations Meeting** - We will hold our annual meeting with association representatives in the fall. We plan to send a meeting announcement in early September.

\*This is a quarterly communication published by the Health Systems Quality Assurance division of the Department of Health.