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**Butler County**  
General Health District

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## **Public meetings to address questions about Bloodborne Infectious Disease Prevention Program**

Fairfield City Council's recent decision to participate in the Butler County Bloodborne Infectious Disease Prevention Program (BIDPP) has prompted the Butler County General Health District to schedule a series of public meetings to detail the elements of the program, answer questions from residents and explain why the program is a good investment in safety and the long-term health of the community.

Fairfield is the second community in Butler County to organize such a program. The Fairfield effort is a partnership with Mercy Health, the Butler County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board (MHARS Board), and the Butler County General Health District. Middletown has already begun a similar program.

The program is a comprehensive, community-based public health initiative that provides disease prevention, education and referral services. Elements of the program include referral to treatment programs to combat addiction, as well as to medical, mental health and social services; education about overdose prevention, infectious diseases and injection safety; safe disposal of used injection equipment; access to sterile injection equipment to fight the spread of infectious diseases; testing and referral to treatment for infectious diseases such as hepatitis, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy testing; hepatitis vaccination; access to an overdose reversing drug; and distribution of personal care items such as socks and underwear, as needed.

“People who inject drugs and participate in a Bloodborne Infectious Disease Prevention Program are five times more likely to enter treatment for substance use disorder and are more likely to reduce or stop injecting,” said Jennifer Bailer, Butler County Health Commissioner, citing a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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Substance use disorder, especially the use of intravenously injected opiates, has become an epidemic in Butler County. The epidemic has impacted the health of the public significantly, according to the Bailer. Hepatitis, HIV and sexually-transmitted diseases are on the rise. Since 2002, the incidence of HIV has increased by 800% and Hepatitis C cases have increased by 300% in Butler County since 2002, according to a report from Butler County General Health District.

“Prevention is the key,” Bailer said. “The cost of running this disease prevention program will be around \$50-60,000 per year. According to the CDC, the lifetime treatment cost for HIV is estimated at \$379,668 (in 2010 dollars). If just one case of HIV is prevented by providing education about infectious diseases and injection safety, the program will have more than paid for itself through prevention,” she said.

“The goal is to keep people healthy and disease free so they can get into a drug treatment program and be successful there,” said Bailer.

Improperly discarded injection equipment is a danger to children, first responders and the general public, Bailer noted. “Too often, people using drugs do so in parks and other public areas where they discard old syringes. One element of this program makes the old syringe a commodity by allowing users to trade it for a new syringe, thereby protecting innocent residents, especially children.”

“These programs are far more than the exchange of clean syringes for used ones,” said Dr. Scott Rasmus, Executive Director of the Butler County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board. “The effort is about preventing infectious diseases which can be very costly and difficult to treat. It is not just the person addicted who benefits, but the entire community.”

Fairfield’s participation in the effort is through the Fairfield Opiate Task Force (FOTF). Bill Woeste, Councilman-at-Large, represents the City on the Task Force. He feels the new program is good news for the entire community.

“We are not only helping those suffering from addiction, but we are able to protect the wider community from the very serious disease of Hepatitis, as well as HIV,” said Councilman Woeste. “The FOTF will continue to pursue any method possible to secure a more healthy and informed community.”

Reducing opiate dependency is a system-wide community health initiative for Mercy Health, according to Shane Knisley, Chief Operating Officer for Mercy Health — Fairfield Hospital. “Our partnership with Butler

County to help reduce bloodborne infectious diseases which result from injecting opiates creates an actionable tactic to help achieve the goal of reduced dependency and improved public health,” Knisley said.

Successful businessman Mat Himm serves on the FOTF. A recovering addict who has not used drugs in five years, Himm has high praise for the effort.

“I have made it a life mission to help those in need who have addiction and mental health issues so they can access treatment and prevention programs,” Himm said. “A Bloodborne Pathogen Program like this one is one of those access points. Not only does the program help prevent the spread of disease, but also many people will be referred to treatment, tested for HIV and Hepatitis, vaccinated for Hepatitis A, and tested for pregnancy. Without a doubt, I would have used this program to keep myself and my community as safe as possible.”

Public meetings have been scheduled in Fairfield to discuss the program, as follows:

**Wednesday, January 9**

10 - 11 a.m.  
Fairfield Wesleyan Church  
4685 Wayne Avenue  
Fairfield, Ohio 45014

**Thursday, January 10**

7 - 8 p.m.  
Fairfield Church of Christ  
745 Symmes Road

**Wednesday, January 23**

7 - 8 p.m.  
Fairfield Freshman School  
790 North Gilmore Road

**Wednesday, January 30**

7 - 8 p.m.  
Mercy Hospital  
3000 Mack Road

**Wednesday, February 6**

7 - 8 p.m.  
Fairfield Community Arts Center  
411 Wessel Drive