



# CLINIC SERVICES IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

by - Connie Werner RN, BSN, Clinic Supervisor

The immunization clinic is probably one of the most recognized services provided through the city of St. Joseph Health Department. When asked what services are offered by the health department, immunizations is often the first response given. Organizing and operating the immunization clinic is old hat to the staff...at least it was until 2020.

As Coronavirus, or COVID-19, moved from being a news brief on the television to a reality in the community, the health department staff were required to take unprecedented actions. Services were suspended or greatly modified. Department services offered at Patee Market Health Center closed to the community and many staff were reassigned to COVID-19 response in one capacity or another. As COVID-19 has evolved, so did the health department's response. There are three nurses and one clinic coordinator staffing the clinic. The COVID-19 response quickly surpassed the small staff's ability to respond as additional department staff were called into action. Soon, it became an all hands on deck approach to try to stay efficient in the face of growing numbers of cases. Establishing priorities has been a necessity in public health and, at that moment, COVID-19 was the top priority. All other services were required to be adjusted or halted accordingly.

As the community reopened services and people began to venture out again, provisions were put into place to allow other health department services to resume while still maintaining the COVID-19 response and maintaining effective environmental controls. Department staff from other divisions who had been assisting in the pandemic

response returned to their primary duties. The health department was at a juncture at which clinic nurses would need further manpower in order to allow for the COVID-19 response to continue uninterrupted while resuming typical clinic services. This came in the form of the ability to hire temporary staff to create a COVID-19 Contact Team. With the added assistance, the pandemic response was covered and clinic staff could focus on how to reopen other clinic services.



As with so many other parts of our lives, COVID-19 has required changes in the way clinic services would be offered. There is a balancing act between offering necessary services to the community and maintaining a safe environment for citizens and staff alike. As with nearly every facet of life since the emergence of COVID-19, this means a compromise between how things have been done in the past and how they will need to be done for the foreseeable future.

Immunizations and tuberculosis (TB) tests are the primary clinic services offered through the health department. In the past, these have been offered on a walk-in basis, with clients and families waiting for the service they are seeking in the lobby. As it was a walk-in service, there was no accurate predictor if the lobby would experience light traffic or be bursting at the seams.

One adjustment made in the face of COVID is, while services are still walk-in, clients are asked to wait in their car after checking in until called back in for their paperwork. There is also a new limit of two children per one adult present. Both of these changes were made to allow for social distancing in an effort to be mindful of the health and well-being of our citizens.

The base processes for clinic programs hasn't changed. As these are offered as walk-in services, they will be completed on a first come, first served basis. The main difference may be in capacity and speed of service. The staff will work as quickly and efficiently as possible, but there may be a more limited capacity due to the enhanced safety measures. This means the community will need to have alternate options to receive vaccinations, if needed. The city of St. Joseph Health Department is always an option to receive immunizations, however, medical providers and other health departments may also be other resources to consider.



COVID-19 has altered so many aspects of our "normal" way of life. The city of St. Joseph Health Department stands ready to be a resource for the community and offer necessary services to continue in our new normal, in a modified manner. With the patience, flexibility and cooperation of the community, the health department will continue to offer services of the past in the new age of COVID-19.