

CONVALESCENT BLOOD PLASMA

Kern health officials renew call for donations to ease burden on hospitals

BY SAM MORGEN
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Kern County officials are calling on those who have recovered from COVID-19 to donate blood plasma in a new effort aimed at saving lives of those hospitalized with the virus.

At a Thursday news conference, local officials said hospitals' requests for convalescent plasma fall short by around 20 to 30 units each day. The plasma, rich in

antibodies, has shown promising results in scientific studies of aiding those impacted the hardest by the coronavirus.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

However, Kern County isn't meeting the demand, and patients suffering from COVID-19 have been left without the potentially lifesaving fluid. Of the 18,411 positive cases reported by the Public

Health Services Department as of Thursday morning, only about 130 people have visited Houchin Community Blood Bank to make plasma donations.

Officials hope that by increasing the number of those donations, hospitalization times of those who have contracted the virus can be reduced and lives can be saved.

"You have a weapon inside your body and that weapon is

something that can save the lives of individuals that are suffering right now," said Houchin CEO Dr. Brad Bryan, addressing those who have recovered from COVID-19. "If you're sitting at home and you're wondering what you can do to help people and you've been through COVID-19, you've been through this, this is something you can do."

He added that interested people can call Houchin at 616-2504.

Individuals will need to show proof of a positive test or of a positive antibody test. Houchin is the only facility in Kern County equipped to handle plasma donations.

Defined as the liquid part of blood, convalescent plasma therapy is an experimental treatment that's shown promise for helping COVID-19 patients. Each

Please see **PLASMA** | A3



Mia Castillo picks weeds from a corn patch in the McKinley Elementary School garden. All weeds are picked by hand in the organic garden.

ALEX HORVATH/THE CALIFORNIAN

Fruits, veggies of their labor

Whether there's extreme heat, shine or no kids on campus, McKinley Elementary staff keeps its garden growing

BY EMA SASIK
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McKinley Elementary School's garden, part of the agriculture academy that lets students experience the full farm-to-table process, has missed a few helping hands that keep it growing these last few months.

Normally, the garden is filled with students preparing soil, watering seedlings, harvesting fruits and vegetables, and later making meals from their crops throughout the school year. But this year's abrupt end to the spring semester also meant the garden would take a bit of a hit.

Crops that were ready to harvest were given to staff members and parents. Leftover plants died, and weeds grew almost 5 feet tall. Even composting worms missed getting



The school received lots of help to build and maintain the organic garden.

leftover scraps from students' breakfasts and lunches, leading to their demise.

"Just having the kids here, walking, they help to maintain the weeds from growing," explained activity leader Mia Castillo. "You can see the

difference. They're growing everywhere, and it's more work for us."

For a garden that's referred to as a living classroom, very little life could be seen for some time.

Please see **GARDEN** | A3

LAW ENFORCEMENT

MADD notes contributions in fight against drunken driving

BY QUINN WILSON
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Mothers Against Drunk Driving Kern County presented 64 awards on Thursday to local law enforcement officers, victim advocates, prosecutors and entities during their law enforcement recognition virtual awards ceremony.

It was an opportunity to recognize those who fight to put an end to drunken and drugged driving, help support victims of impaired driving crimes and prevent underage drinking, according to event host Jessica Harrington of KERO-TV 23.

MADD National President Helen Witty spoke of the tragic death of her daughter and how it got her involved in the cause.

"I came here because of someone else's choice to drive after drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana," Witty said. "My daughter wanted to work off some stress so I decided to go rollerblading. I never saw her again."

"That same day another girl, who worked her stress off with alcohol and marijuana, ran my daughter down on that bike path."

Law enforcement officers were recognized from a variety of departments including the California Highway Patrol, Kern County Sheriff's Office, and city police departments from Bakersfield, Arvin, Stallions Springs, California City, Shafter, Taft, Ridgecrest and McFarland.

Please see **MADD** | A3



REP. JOHN LEWIS

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Lice become one more head-scratcher during pandemic

BY JOHN COX
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Just when everyone thought they had enough worries, here's a new one: tiny parasites living in your hair.

A national chain of lice clinics reported Thursday its Bakersfield operation experienced a 37 percent increase in treatments between April and May.

Lice Clinics of America said the jump in cases has probably been caused by family members who have had to shelter together in close quarters during the COVID-19 quarantine.

But it's unclear how widespread the increase is locally. Local medical offices including Stockdale Pediatrics said they had noticed no particular surge

in cases recently.

A spokeswoman for the Kern County Public Health Services Department said the agency, too, was unaware of any increase in local lice cases.

She said head lice, though a "significant nuisance," don't transmit disease to humans. She also noted that the county doesn't require public reporting of an infestation of head lice.

A brochure issued by the California Department of Public Health says lice typically feed on the blood of school-age children. It estimates annual U.S. infestations at 6 million to 12 million per year.

Lice Clinics of America says traditional, over-the-counter lice treatments generally contain pesticides that are ineffective. Kimberly Stellman, owner of Tiny Locks, a lice-removal service based in Southern California with a specialist who makes house calls in Bakersfield, said her business is relatively slow now because kids are out of school. But she wasn't all that surprised to

Please see **LICE** | A3



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