

CONVALESCENT BLOOD PLASMA

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

BY SAM MORGAN
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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. 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 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 treatment. Each

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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 SASIC
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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' break-fasts 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.

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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 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, Stallion Springs, California City, Shafter, Taft, Ridgecrest and McFarland.

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REP. JOHN LEWIS

A final farewell to the congressman and civil rights icon

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PREP BASKETBALL

East girls, BCHS boys cap magical seasons with championship rings

SPORTS | C1

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 in-

festation 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 pes-

ticides 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

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PRICE: \$1.25

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OUTSIDE TODAY

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LOCAL



ALEX HORVATH / THE CALIFORNIAN

For a treat, Jesse Sanchez feeds the McKinley Elementary School chickens mealworms.

GARDEN

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Not wanting to let the area suffer any longer, Castillo and Jesse Sanchez, who work with students and maintain the garden year-round, rolled up their sleeves, cleared out dead plants and got to replanting.

For four hours a day, the two, switching off which days they come in, feed five egg-laying chickens, tend to seedlings and growing crops, plant new ones if needed and check on the worms.

It was a tough job for two to handle by themselves. During the school year, students do most of the planting and seeding, while the two activity leaders serve as "coaches," in a sense.

"We had to plant 90 corn seeds, and when you have 20 kids, it gets done quick," said Sanchez. "It's taken a little bit more time to get done" this time around, however.

But the fruit of their labor, literally, can be seen these days: zucchini, corn, watermelons, tomatoes, peaches, pomegranates and everything else in between is growing and near harvest.

The massive undertaking was worth it, Sanchez said, because it keeps the soil healthy and can provide produce to the community. Earlier in the school year, students put on a farmers market and earned about \$500.

Students even learn how to use their fruits and vegetables to make meals in the school's newly added kitchen, which can turn into healthy eating habits. McKinley Principal Rona Chacon-Mellon said one student last year never wanted to try fruits or vegetables and only ever wanted to eat chicken nuggets and other fast-food items.

During an hors d'oeuvre tasting, students topped crackers with radishes, Greek yogurt, chives, lemon juice and sea salt, and the student "loved it."

"After that, he brought bringing his father to the produce section in the grocery store and they started eating kale and new, healthier things," explained Chacon-Mellon.

"It really is life-changing, not only for the child but the whole family. Once they grow the food, they're more willing to try to taste the food and expand those horizons."

It'll take some time for students to get back in the garden since they will start the school year in a distance learning model, but Castillo said most students have the skills to start a garden of their own at home.

But until they return, Castillo and Sanchez will continue to miss their presence, they said, especially when they have to start planting a new batch of crops when the weather cools down. The worms, too, will miss out on leftover meals for the time being.

Ema Sasic can be reached at 661-395-7332. Follow her on Twitter: @ema_sasic.



Mia Castillo picks weeds from the former cucumber patch. All weeds are picked by hand in the organic garden.



Parsley is part of the organic garden.

Kern health dept. reports more than 1,000 new cases, 4 more deaths

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

The Kern County Public Health Services Department reported four new coronavirus-related deaths and 1,067 new COVID-19 cases Thursday morning.

The total local case count now sits at 18,421 since the first was reported March 13. There have been 139 COVID-19 fatalities in Kern during that time, according to county data.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Of the local cases, 5,527 individuals have recovered from the virus and 12,525 patients are recuperating at home, county data shows.

According to state records, there are 265 patients being treated at local hospitals, 76 of which are in the ICU.

PLASMA

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convalescent plasma donation can benefit three to four people, with studies showing diminished mortality and shorter hospitalization times from those who have received the plasma.

In recent weeks, hospitals have become overwhelmed with patients suffering from coronavirus, with projections showing hospitalizations will likely increase over the next few months. Hoping to respond to the surge and reduce deaths, Kern County has started actively recruiting those who have suffered from COVID-19 for plasma donation.

The effort is the first to actively target coronavirus patients for donations locally. Through the county health department's contact tracing program, the county is encouraging such donations. On Monday, a separate group of Kern County employees will begin calling coronavirus patients

to request the donations over the phone.

"We cannot force people to donate blood," county Chief Administrative Officer Ryan Alsop said during the meeting. "What we can do is to put a significant effort into convincing people that it's the right thing to do. They are needed. The community is calling on them to come forward and assist."

The county will also contribute \$500,000 to a six-month advertising campaign designed to promote public health practices like washing hands and wearing a mask. Included in that messaging will be requests for convalescent plasma donations.

While the advertising campaign will be primarily funded by the county and the city of Bakersfield, the local medical community will lead the effort.

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LICE

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hear of new infestations.

"The big difference I'm noticing now is it's affecting the whole family," she said. Instead of one to two people per household being affected, she added, it's become more typical that three or four people in the same home have lice.

"It's not spreading in a school setting, it's spreading in the home," she said.

While there are a number of private services that treat lice infestations with specialized equipment, the state health department says the best way to get rid of lice is to comb the hair of the affected person every day with a nit comb for two weeks.

It cautions that there's no evidence vinegar,

mayonnaise or olive oil are effective lice treatments. It also notes that common, over-the-counter treatments may kill adult lice but not their eggs, which are known as nits.

The agency further recommends machine-washing in hot water and then drying at full heat all clothing, bedding and other materials the affected person has recently come into contact with. Anything that cannot be washed that way should be placed in a sealed bag for two weeks,

it said, to deprive the lice of blood so they die. The state says another good idea is to vacuum carpets and furniture the affected person has come into contact with.

Quinn Wilson can be reached at 661-395-7491. Follow him on Twitter: @qrutter.

MADD

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BPD Officer Robert Tyo and CHP Officer Dallas Plotner each received honor of Top Arresting Officer. Tyo made 142 DUI arrests in 2019 while Plotner made 141.

"In truth, I honored," Plotner said. "I take great pride in my work and I consider every arrest a life saved. I will continue to work hard for everyone here."

"What gives me the drive to pursue DUI offenses is the unknowns," Tyo said. "It's the unknown if the vehicle I stopped and the driver that I arrested could have caused an accident and hurt themselves or others."

Tyo explained the main pattern he sees in DUI cases are people taking unnecessary risks. Bakersfield Police Chief Greg Terry said that in today's age of technology, nobody has an excuse not finding an Uber, taxi or a friend for a ride home.

Probation Officer of the Year was given to Samuel Heredia of the Kern County Probation Department. Heredia's supervisor, Brian J. Mara, called him dependable, respectful and professional



COURTESY OF MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING

Bakersfield Police Chief Greg Terry, center, is pictured with some of his officers who were honored Thursday during the Mothers Against Drunk Driving Kern County law enforcement recognition virtual awards ceremony.

in his work while bringing a "great work ethic." "A lot of what his job entails is holding people accountable and also giving them the opportunity to address their problems," Mara said.

Herman Caldas of the Kern County District Attorney's Office was awarded Investigator of the Year and Nicole Ilturria

of the DA's office was awarded Victim Advocate of the Year. District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer presented the awards to her colleagues.

"Drunk driving crashes inflict injury and horrific losses to our community without warning, and oftentimes without remorse," Zimmer said. "I am proud to be a part of recognizing the service



COURTESY OF MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVING

Herman Caldas, second from left, of the Kern County District Attorney's Office was awarded Investigator of the Year. Nicole Ilturria of the DA's office, center, was awarded Victim Advocate of the Year. District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer, left, presented the awards.

of all of the law enforcement officers in our community to ensure there will be no more victims."

KGET-TV 17 was awarded the Community Champion Award for its "Kern's Sober Reality" segment, which highlights issues surrounding local drunken driving.

In total, there were more than 4,200 DUI arrests made in Kern

County in 2019, which averages to more than 11 per day, Harrington said.

She added that someone is more likely to die of a DUI crash in Kern than any other county in California. Harrington also pointed out that Kern County was the second-worst county in the United States regarding that statistic.