Welcome to the Northeast Tennessee Regional Health Office

Our Regional Health Office is the central location for public health administration in Northeast Tennessee. We support the work of our county departments and lead epidemiology, environmental health, and disaster preparedness efforts for our counties.

There are seven county health departments in our region that serve hundreds of thousands of people every year. While all our departments offer basic public health services, each county health department reaches a unique population with specific needs. Some of our counties are very rural areas and others are in urban locations. Our health educators and other health professionals identify the health needs of their population to create effective programs and services to address those needs.

Such a variety in populations and services offers students a chance to expand their skills through observation and field work. You will have a hands-on opportunity to become a public health professional and make a real difference in the lives of people you serve.

I hope you find your experience with the Regional Health Office to be a fulfilling one. We are here to support you in your professional and educational endeavors. Best wishes to you and congratulations for reaching this milestone in your academic career.

Sincerely,

Rebekah A. English, RN, MPH
The Northeast Tennessee Regional Health Department supports the work of each county health department in its jurisdiction. Located in Johnson City, the Northeast Regional Office is responsible for providing guidance within the region in areas of community emergency preparedness, communicable and environmental disease control, health education, and outreach.

Services offered by our county health departments:

- Vital Records
- Breast & Cervical Cancer Screening
- Children’s Special Services
- Communicable Disease Services
- Community Health Assessment
- Dental Services
- TennCare Kids / EPSD&T
- Family Planning
- General Environmental Health
- Health Promotion
- HUGS (Help Us Grow Successfully)
- Immunizations
- Nutrition Services
- Pregnancy Services
- Primary Care
- WIC

Northeast Tennessee County Health Departments

Primary Prevention Initiative (PPI)

Primary prevention is designed to prevent a disease or condition from occurring in the first place. The Primary Prevention Initiative (PPI) was established by the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) Commissioner Dr. John J. Dreyzehner in August 2012.

The goal of PPI is to focus the Department’s energy on primary prevention, engaging all TDH employees’ efforts in eliminating risk factors for later health problems within their own communities. TDH employee teams are multidisciplinary and include clerical, nursing, clinical, and administrative staff. Topics and activities vary from county to county, depending upon the needs in the community.

PPI was rolled out statewide in January 2013 and to date has included the following topics:

- Tobacco Prevention and Control
- Obesity Prevention
- Teen Pregnancy Prevention
- Infant Mortality
- Substance Use and Abuse
- Immunizations
- Healthcare Associated Infections
- Suicide Prevention
- Occupational Injuries

PPI projects are not confined to the topics listed above. Each Northeast Regional County Department determines areas of focus for PPI projects in addition to the normal services they provide.
Guidelines for working in a health department

The employee policies are designed to keep the workplace safe and professional and give everyone involved the best experience possible. If you have any questions about the policies, ask your preceptor or the academic coordinator for the Regional Health Office.

Dress Code

As a public servant of the State of Tennessee, you are expected to maintain a professional standard of dress and grooming that reflects good taste and common sense. Dress appropriately for your office or your working conditions. Specific dress codes may be established for some work units and/or departments.

If you have questions about the dress code you should talk with your supervisor. If you are not sure whether or not something is appropriate, ask before you wear it.

These items are not professional:

- Blue jeans (skirts, pants, or shorts)
- Shorts and t-shirts
- Tennis shoes/sneakers
- Flip flops
- Tight or baggy clothing
- Short skirts
- Low-cut shirts
- Wrinkled or stained clothing
- Excessive jewelry
- Leggings/tights without a skirt or tunic
Confidentiality and Conduct

While doing your field placement, you may be exposed to confidential information in the form of records, observations, or conversations.

Any information you learn at work about a patient or a client must remain confidential. This means you may not discuss anything about patients or clients outside of your work, including the names of clients, or someone you may have seen who is there as a patient.

Confidentiality breaches are a serious matter. You may be dismissed if you violate confidentiality rules - even unintentionally.

Rosa, a hospital student volunteer, was working in the ICU waiting room when she learned Mrs. Daniels, who attends her church, was a patient in the ICU. Rosa knew the woman had no family living nearby.

The next day Rosa was at the grocery store and ran into Norma Gray, the secretary at her church. She shared that Mrs. Daniels was very sick, and that she was worried about her. Norma put Mrs. Daniels on the prayer list in the church bulletin and notified the minister that Mrs. Daniels may want a visit.

A few days later Mrs. Daniels was out of the ICU and had moved to a patient floor. When her minister showed up in her hospital room with a card signed by the members of the ladies church club, she was very upset. Mrs. Daniels had asked that she remain on the confidential list because she did not want people to know she was in the hospital.

Although Rosa’s intentions had been good, she had violated the confidentiality policy of the hospital. She was dismissed as a volunteer and could not complete the hours she needed for her academic program.

Conduct and behavior
You are expected to behave with courtesy and respect toward everyone at all times. Your attitude should be professional in all your communication. This includes face-to-face conversations, and conversations held over the phone or via email. Use common sense and courtesy as you interact with others.

If you encounter a situation with a client or coworker that has the potential for conflict, stay calm and avoid escalating the conflict. Contact your preceptor immediately for help.

ID badges
You will be issued an ID badge that you should wear every time you work. Make sure your ID badge is clearly visible and easy to read. Wearing your ID badge is important because:

- It grants you access to the building/facility.
- It is a security tool that protects employees and clients.
- It tells others who you are and what your role is.
Equipment/technology

Equipment and technology is state property and should be used only for work purposes.

*Telephones*
You can make a personal local telephone call if you are on a break and the conversation is brief. Long distance calls for personal reasons are never allowed. If you need to make a long distance call for work, ask your supervisor for the proper procedure for placing long distance calls.

*Cameras*
Never take any photos at work using a personal device including cellphones, computers, or cameras. If you are asked to take photos for a work reason, use a camera owned by the health department.

*Computers and printers*
You will be given a username and password. Do not share this information with anyone. You may also have access to email and internet. Use these resources for work purposes only. Do not visit websites that are not related to your work. You may not access any social media sites for personal reasons while at work.

Unauthorized use of state computers or systems could result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. If you need to install programs, or have any issue with your computer, contact the Information Systems department at your facility. Do not attempt to load programs or fix issues on your own.

*Personal cellphones*
Do not use your personal cellphone at work unless there is an emergency situation or you are on a break.

That means phones should be turned off and stored when you are working.

*Attendance*
You and your preceptor will determine your work schedule. You are expected to arrive on time for your shifts. You may not alter your work schedule without your preceptor’s prior consent.

If you need to miss a day, or you are running late, contact your preceptor as soon as possible. It is understandable that this may happen, but remember that it is your responsibility to complete the number of hours you need for your program. Plan your schedule wisely.

Excessive tardiness or absence may result in termination of your field placement.
The Placement Process — STEP 1

Submitting your application

The first thing you must do is submit a resume and cover letter to the academic coordinator at the Regional Health Office. These materials are considered your application for a field placement or volunteer experience at the Regional Health Office or any of the seven counties in our region. Email your resume/cover letter as PDF attachments (or Word only if you cannot create a PDF) to Kristen.Spencer@tn.gov.

The deadlines for application materials are:

- The first Friday in April for the fall semester
- The first Friday in November for the spring semester
- First Friday in March for the summer term

These placements, particularly Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Community Health, are filled quickly and on a first-come, first-served basis. We place as many students as we are able, but we also want all students to have a fulfilling experience.

Most students begin the field placement application process early in the semester before they need to do the field experience. Do not wait until the deadline to apply.

Students who submit materials after these deadlines will not be considered unless we have open positions that have no other applicants.

Resume and Cover Letter Guidelines

Your resume and cover letter are the first impression you make upon the professionals who will be giving you their time and experience for an entire semester. You want that impression to be as pleasant and professional as possible. Consider these tips as you are writing your resume and cover letter:

Proofread your work. A common mistake is sending a resume and cover letter full of careless typos and errors. It’s a sign of laziness at best and incompetence at worst. You probably won’t be asked in for an interview if your resume and cover letter are full of errors.

Maintain a professional tone. It is okay to be relaxed and friendly; however, remember to be professional. Opening your letter/email with “Hey” or using texting abbreviations/symbols is not appropriate. Until you are told otherwise, address people as “Ms.” or “Mr.” Use first names only if you are not sure about gender.

Clearly state your academic background and interests. After a quick glance at your resume and cover letter, the reader should know what you want to do and what skills you can contribute.

Put your name in the file name. Calling the file “resume” makes sense to you, but for the person receiving multiple applications, your file can be lost. Name the file so that it can be found easily.

Format your materials correctly. Your cover letter is a business letter. Your resume should be neatly organized in a clear, readable font. Avoid templates for either the resume or cover letter. Review examples you like and use elements to create materials that are unique to you.

Create a single PDF. Combine the resume and cover letter into one document and save it as a PDF. If possible do not send Word documents.

Meet deadlines. If you don’t (or are close) acknowledge it without making excuses. “Thank you for your consideration of my materials” is much better than “I’ve been really busy.”

REMEMBER: Your resume and cover letter are the first impression you make. Take time to ensure they are neat, correct, and clear.
**STEP 2. The Interview**

After your resume and cover letter are received, we may ask you to come in for an interview to match you with the appropriate department/position.

Be prepared to talk about your academic interests and any professional/volunteer experience you have. Depending on what health department you are matched with, you may be asked to come in for a second interview there.

*Some sample interview questions you may be asked:*

- Do you have any specific programs or projects you would like to be a part of?
- What skills do you hope to gain from your field experience?
- Have you had any experience working in public health? What did you learn from that experience? (If not, that is okay. Talk about another professional/volunteer experience you gained skills from.)

**STEP 3. Required Forms**

Before you can begin your field placement, you will need to make sure all necessary forms and paperwork are complete.

A checklist is included in Step 5, and the academic coordinator will help you know what needs to be done.

You may have additional forms to complete at your field placement site. Ask your supervisor at the site what you will need to complete there.

All your forms should be completed by the conclusion of the semester before you begin the field placement.

**STEP 4. Skills Test**

You may be required to complete a skills test before you are placed based on your field placement type and project. If so, you will be asked to take the skills test as a part of your initial interview process.

**STEP 5. Field Experience/Practicum Placement Checklist**

The following items must be complete before the field placement can begin.

- Academic advisor approval form
- Cover letter/resume
- Interview(s)
- Skills test (if requested)
- Six-in-one form completed
- Volunteer mobilizer sign-up

**AHD Student Checklist:**

- Send AHD Coordinator resumé, cover letter, and brief description of goals and interests.
- Respond promptly to all correspondence.
- If offered, interview on site with potential preceptor; allow about 30 minutes when making this appointment unless otherwise specified.
- If accepted, promptly respond to offer of position.
- AHD Coordinator will schedule a time to "onboard" you; allow about an hour when making this appointment.
- Create your work schedule and set expectations with your preceptor.