Officials Highlight Need for Modernized Public Health System

National Public Health Week serves as backdrop to discussing the future of public health

National Public Health Week, is April 6-12. In Iowa, the theme for this year’s observance is “Public Health Modernization as a Foundation for a Healthy Iowa.”

“This year, an important discussion is taking place regarding the modernization of Iowa’s public health system,” said Shelley Bickel. “Unfortunately, many people are unaware of what public health is or how it effects their lives. This event provides us with the opportunity to show the people of Decatur County what public health does every day to promote and protect their health.”

Currently, each county in Iowa provides public health services; however, the services may be very different from county to county. In 2004, a group of more than 150 local and state public health practitioners determined that standards should be written to define what every Iowan should reasonably expect from public health. The Public Health Modernization Initiative builds upon those standards to assure a basic level of public health service delivery in each of Iowa’s 99 counties.

“Public health is everywhere in our community—it’s in the water we drink, in the immunizations we get for our children, and on the sidewalks and bike paths we use every day,” Shelley added. “National Public Health Week has provided us with a unique opportunity to reach out to those we serve so that they best understand how a modernized public health system will benefit them.”

Public health services in the recently completed Iowa Public Health Standards include: prevent epidemics, and the spread of disease; protect against environmental hazards; prevent injuries; promote healthy behaviors; and prepare for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies. The standards also provide a baseline for many elements of organizational capacity, including: governance; administration; communication and information technology; workforce; community assessment and planning; and evaluation.

To learn more about public health and Iowa’s efforts to modernize the current system, contact Shelley Bickel at Decatur County Public Health at 641-446-6518 or visit the Public Health Modernization Initiative Web site at www.idph.state.iowa.us/mpi.