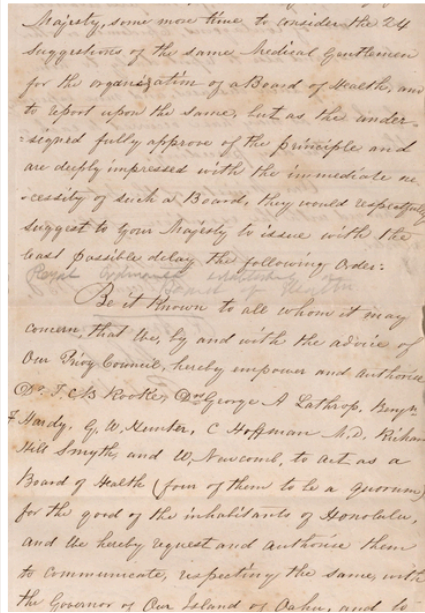




OLAKINO MAIKA'I

To Improve Your Health and Well-Being



It's DOH's birthday

Hawai'i's public health mission began 175 years ago, and continues strong today.

Flu season is here

Give your 'ohana the gift of protection by getting your flu shot this December.

Brown water alerts

New advisory signs from Clean Water Branch help keep Hawai'i's beaches safe this rainy season.

Time to Protect Yourself and your 'Ohana from the Flu



'Tis the season! That's right, flu season is here, and influenza cases are on the rise in Hawai'i. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones. **National Influenza Vaccination Week** (Dec. 1 to 6) reminds us that it's not too late to get your flu shot.

Influenza can cause serious illness, especially for kūpuna, young children, and those with chronic health conditions. The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone six months and older.

Flu shots are available at most pharmacies, clinics, and health care providers statewide. Even if you're healthy, vaccination helps protect your community by reducing the spread of illness.

Give yourself the gift of good health this season. Roll up your sleeve, get your flu shot, and help keep Hawai'i healthy through the holidays and beyond.

[FIND A VACCINATION LOCATION](#)

MO'OLELO OLAKINO

History of Health

December 1850: It's our birthday!



In December 1850, King Kamehameha III established the Kingdom of Hawai'i's Board of Health, marking the official beginning of organized public health in the islands.

Formed in response to devastating epidemics of smallpox, measles, and other infectious diseases, the Board worked to protect communities through quarantine, sanitation and vaccination efforts.

Over time, its responsibilities grew to include food safety, water quality and medical services for those in need.

Following the transition to territorial and then state government, the agency evolved into today's DOH, continuing its long tradition of promoting and protecting health across the islands.



From 19th-century quarantine stations to modern disease surveillance and emergency preparedness, the DOH's mission remains rooted in the same purpose envisioned 174 years ago: safeguarding the well-being of Hawai'i's people and communities.

This December, we honor that legacy – and the ongoing commitment to public health that continues to shape a healthier Hawai'i for generations to come.

Healthy Habits: Your Holiday Gift to Yourself



Amid the celebrations, gatherings, and hustle of the season, it's easy to put our own well-being on the back burner. But the best gift you can give yourself – and those you love — is good health. Here are simple ways to nurture your mind, body, and spirit as the year comes to a close.

1. Move a little more and find ways to lighten up holiday meals. 🧑🏻‍🦳

You don't need a gym membership or a strict routine to stay active. Take an evening stroll to enjoy the lights, dance while you cook, or start your day with gentle stretching. Small bursts of movement boost energy, and reduce stress. Find ways to add something light and fresh – a fruit platter or salad with local greens and fruits to the 'ono holiday spread.

2. Take time to rest and recharge. zzz

The holidays can be joyful, but they can also be exhausting. Prioritize rest by getting enough sleep, setting aside quiet moments, and saying “no” when you need to. Your body and mind will thank you with more focus, patience, and resilience.

3. Practice gratitude and connection. ❤️

Reflecting on what you're thankful for, and sharing that gratitude with others, can lift your mood and strengthen relationships. Call an old friend, write a thank-you note, or volunteer your time to help someone in need.

4. Pay attention to the “holiday blues”. 📞

As the days grow shorter and routines get busier, many people notice changes in mood or energy that go beyond the usual “holiday blues.” Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression linked to changes in daylight and routine. Symptoms can include low energy, oversleeping, craving carbohydrates, or withdrawing from others.

Seek help early. If symptoms persist, talk to a healthcare provider or call 988 for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Caring for your mental health is one of the best gifts you can give yourself this season, and all year long.

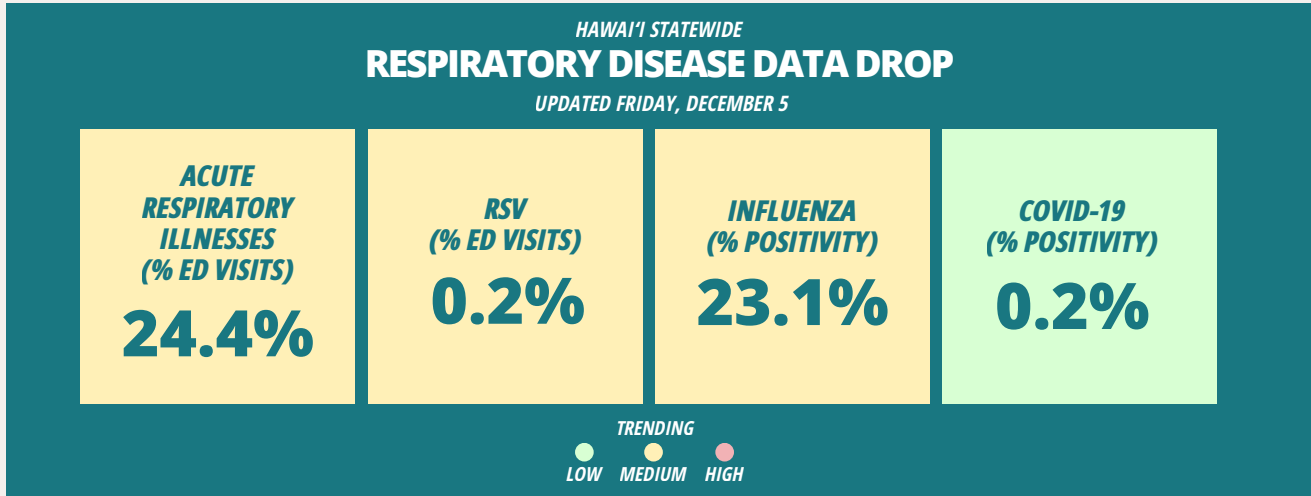
5. Start today! ✅

Healthy habits don't have to wait for the new year. Start now, and you'll carry the benefits well into the months ahead. Because caring for yourself is the foundation for sharing aloha with everyone around you.

IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

This Week's RSV and COVID-19 Data



This week's data shows medium activity levels for acute respiratory illnesses (24.4% ED visits) and RSV (0.2% ED visits). Influenza (23.1% positivity) activity level is medium, and COVID-19 (0.2% positivity) activity level remains low.

RESPIRATORY DISEASE DASHBOARD

Life Expectancy in Hawai'i: What the Latest Data Reveals



In Hawai'i, we share a deep value for living long, healthy lives rooted in community, culture, and place. However, longstanding social and economic inequities have created significant differences in life expectancy across our population.

To better understand these differences, the DOH Office of Health Equity partnered with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to analyze statewide death records. The study found that Native Hawaiians continue to experience a 10-year shorter life expectancy compared to the longest-living group, while Pacific Islanders face a nearly 19-year gap. Because Pacific Islander data was not included in previous estimates, the duration of this disparity is unknown. These differences reflect broader systemic challenges, including unequal access to healthcare, the impacts of discrimination, and the enduring effects of colonization.

The study highlights the importance of detailed race and ethnicity data to identify inequities and guide culturally grounded, evidence-based strategies that improve access to health resources for all communities.

[MORE STUDY FINDINGS](#)

[LEARN MORE](#)

Is the water brown? Turn around!



It's the rainy season in the islands, and a good time to pay closer attention to water quality at your favorite beach.

The DOH is expanding installation of Brown Water Advisory signs to better inform beachgoers of the risks of contaminated coastal waters.

Brown or murky water can be caused by heavy rainfall and polluted runoff, and can carry sewage, pesticides, animal waste, and harmful pathogens that may lead to gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes, and ear, eye, or respiratory infections.

The signs serve as an important public health tool, raising awareness of potential hazards and helping residents and visitors make informed choices. The message is simple: "If the water is brown, turn around." DOH recommends avoiding brown water and exposed beach sand for 48 to 72 hours after heavy rain and until conditions improve.

Installation is well underway. Nearly all Maui sites are now complete, with Moloka'i next in early December 2025. O'ahu installations are planned to begin in January 2026, followed by Kaua'i and Hawai'i Island.

DOH extends its appreciation to Maui County and the City and County of Honolulu for their partnership in keeping our coastal waters safer for all.

WATER QUALITY ADVISORIES

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



The holiday season is often filled with joy and connection. But for many, it can also bring feelings of loss and longing. **Grief Awareness Week** (Dec. 2 to 8) is a time to honor those we've lost and to recognize that healing looks different for everyone. Whether you are facing an empty seat at the table or a quiet space around the Christmas tree, know that you are not alone, and help is available.

If you're grieving, reach out to friends, family, or community support groups. Sharing stories, memories, and moments of aloha can bring comfort and connection.

Help is always available. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers free, 24-hour support for anyone in distress. Local bereavement and hospice programs also provide counseling and group support for those coping with loss.

This season, let's care for one another with patience, understanding, and aloha. No one should have to grieve alone.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH



In Hawai'i, ringing in the New Year often comes with bright skies and loud pops – but fireworks also bring real risks. Every year, 911 Dispatchers, DOH County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Hospital Emergency Departments across the state respond to injuries caused by fireworks, from burns to hearing loss and serious hand or eye injuries. The numbers reported by the Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention Systems Branch make that clear: after a long stretch of lower injury counts in the 2010s (23 people treated statewide in 2011–2012), injuries have climbed again in recent years. Most concerning, New Year's 2024–2025 saw **110 total fireworks injuries**, nearly matching the highest level on record (112 in 2009–2010) and almost double what we saw just a year earlier (**60 in 2023–2024**).

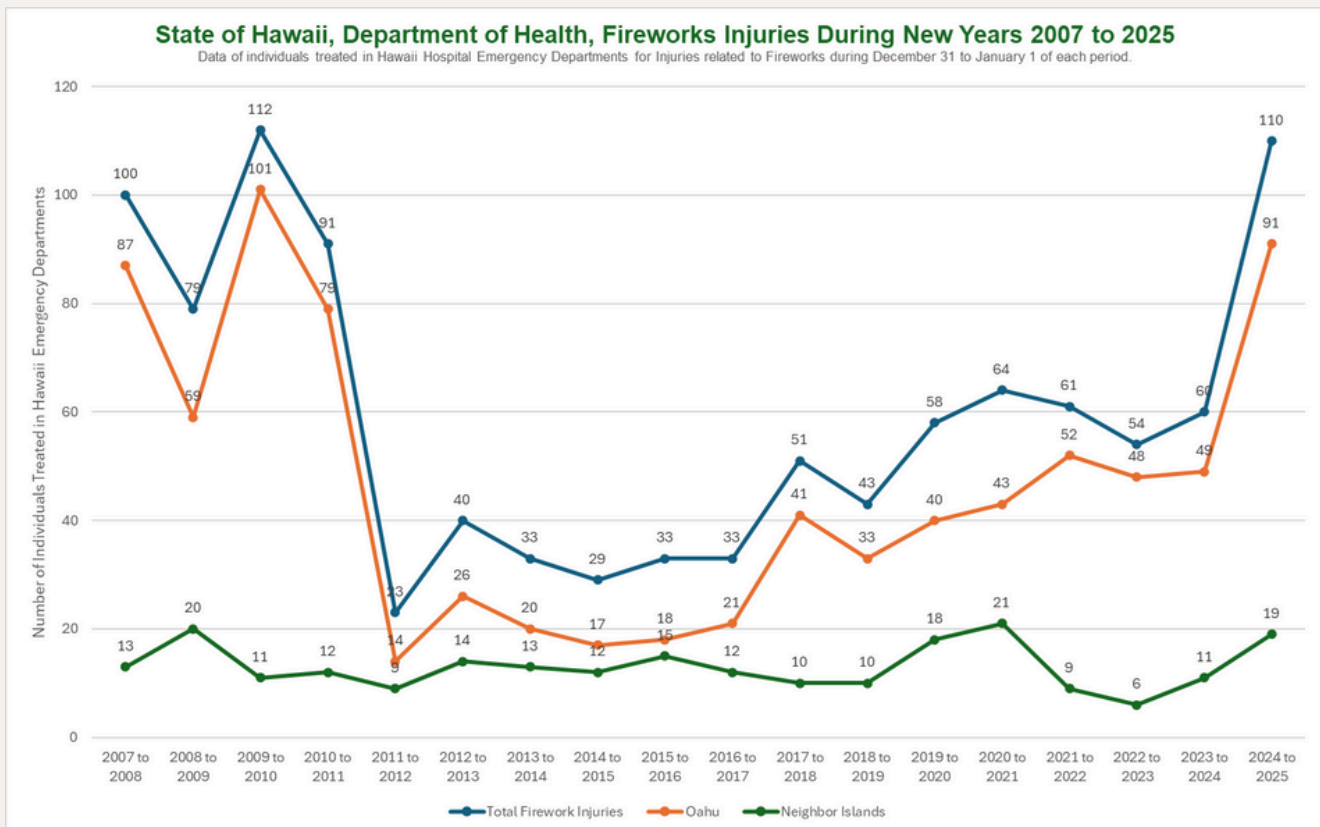
O'ahu continues to carry most of the burden. In 2024–2025, **91 of the 110 injuries** were on O'ahu, while the Neighbor Islands reported **19 injuries**. That pattern has been consistent over many years, and it's a reminder that what happens in our neighborhoods quickly becomes an emergency.

If you choose to celebrate:

- Use only legal fireworks
- Follow all county rules on permits and times of use
- Always light fireworks outdoors and away from people, homes, and flammable materials
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby
- Soak used fireworks before discarding them
- Never allow children to handle fireworks, and always supervise kids closely when around fireworks

Illegal aerial fireworks are dangerous and can cause fires or severe injuries. Leave those to the professionals.

Let's welcome 2026 with joy, not a trip to a hospital emergency department. Celebrate responsibly so everyone can start the new year safe, healthy, and together.



PUBLIC HEALTH



DOH staff Nicole Odviar (left) and Ashley Oshiro (right) learn about medical cannabis cultivation during a field trip designed to educate Department employees on how cannabis is grown, processed, and used to support patients with serious chronic conditions.

Over the past year, the Office of Medical Cannabis Control and Regulation (OMCCR) hosted a yearlong series of Medical Cannabis Education Days across O'ahu, Hawai'i Island, Kaua'i, and Maui. Reaching nearly 300 participants in person and online, the events provided trusted, evidence-based information to registered medical cannabis patients and their caregivers.

Each session featured cannabinoid educated medical professionals who answered questions, discussed safe use and dosing, reviewed drug interactions, and helped attendees understand product labels, cannabinoids, terpenes, and integrative care. Participants described the events as welcoming and empowering, with many noting that the gatherings reduced stigma and helped them feel supported in managing chronic conditions.

OMCCR also expanded statewide outreach this year, including continuing education for healthcare professionals and participation in major community events such as the Active Senior Expo, where the OMCCR booth was among the most visited. Together, these efforts underscore the program's commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care.

SHORT TAKES

Drive Sober, Hawai'i!



December is **National Impaired Driving Prevention Month**, a reminder that alcohol, drugs, and even certain medications can make driving dangerous. Every year, impaired driving leads to serious injuries and fatalities, impacting families and communities across Hawai'i.

Plan ahead: Designate a sober driver, use ride-share or public transportation, or stay overnight if you've been drinking. Even one safe choice can prevent a tragedy.

The DOH encourages everyone to celebrate responsibly and look out for one another. This holiday season, give yourself and your 'ohana the gift of safety – drive sober, arrive safe.

Know Your HIV Status, Protect Your 'Ohana



Dec. 1 marked **World AIDS Day**, a time to raise awareness about HIV prevention, testing, and care. The DOH offers free and confidential HIV testing at clinics statewide, along with access to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and support services for people living with HIV.

Early detection and treatment save lives and help prevent transmission. Whether you're getting tested for the first time or staying on top of your health, these services are available to everyone across Hawai'i.

Take a moment for your health and your community: know your status, get tested, and protect your 'ohana.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Congratulations to Hawai'i's IC&RC Professionals of the Year

The Hawai'i Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division (ADAD) congratulates two outstanding professionals who were recognized by the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC) as Professionals of the Year. This annual award honors credentialed professionals in prevention, substance use disorder, and peer recovery for exceptional commitment, innovation, and positive impact in their field.



Dr. Niki Wright, PsyD, CSAC

Dr. Niki Wright, PsyD, CSAC, was recognized for her work as Director of Mālama Recovery Services and Ho'okūola Hale at Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center. Dr. Wright has dedicated her career to reducing the stigma of mental illness and addiction, expanding access to care and mentoring the next generation of behavioral health professionals.



MaryElizabeth Pacheco,
CCS, CSAC, CPS

MaryElizabeth Pacheco, CCS, CSAC, CPS, Clinical Director at Hina Mauka Teen CARE, was honored for her leadership in guiding clinical teams, training staff, and strengthening school-based mental health systems across Hawai'i.

Their work inspires us all.

***Please note that our DOH Punchbowl offices will be closed on Thursday, Dec. 25, in observance of Christmas Day.**

INFORMATION HOTLINES

DOCD Disease Reporting Line

Assistance with an outbreak of cases

O'ahu (808) 586-4586

Maui (808) 984-8213

Kaua'i (808) 241-3563

Hilo (808) 933-0912

Kona (808) 322-4877

DOH Hotline

Get information & resources

Call (808) 586-4400

Hawai'i CARES 988 Hotline

Local crisis counselors are available to help 24/7

Call or Text 9-8-8

or Call (808) 832-3100

or Call 1-800-753-6879

Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Hawaii

The go-to source for Medicare Fraud Prevention

Education and referral assistance for related

scams.

Toll Free: 1-800-296-9422

info@smphawaii.org

Big mahalo to everyone who shared story ideas with us. We love to hear from you! If there's a topic you'd like us to cover, please let us know at doh.comm@doh.hawaii.gov.

In Hawaiian, the word olakino refers to the state of health and well-being. The word "ola" means life and health, and the word "kino" means body. Olakino is generally considered to be the greatest wealth and great health that one can attain, not just of the body but holistically. Maika'i in Hawaiian means good or wellbeing.

Follow us on social media

Connect with your public health community and receive current alerts and news every day.

