



OLAKINO MAIKA'I

To Improve Your Health and Well-Being



Healthy Relationships

Explore how respect, communication, and consent build healthier, happier relationships for teens and adults alike.

A pioneer in treating Hansen's disease

Discover how a young scientist with Hawai'i ties transformed medicine and left a lasting public health legacy.

Photo: University of Hawai'i

Don't throw in the trash

From phones to e-bikes and more, understand how to use, store, and dispose of lithium-ion batteries safely.

Building Healthy Relationships: Respect, Communication, and Support



It's February, and love is in the air! ❤️

From Valentine's cards and roses to heartfelt texts, this month is all about connection. February is also Healthy Relationships Month and Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, making it a perfect time to reflect on what healthy relationships really look like, and why they matter for our emotional and mental well-being.

Healthy relationships, whether romantic, familial, or friendships, are built on respect, trust, open communication, and consent. They help reduce stress, build confidence, and support overall health. When relationships feel safe and supportive, people are more likely to thrive at home, school, and work.

At the same time, it's important to recognize signs of unhealthy or unsafe relationships. Teen dating violence can include emotional, physical, sexual, or digital abuse, and it affects young people of all backgrounds. The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) emphasizes prevention through early education, healthy communication skills, and supportive adults who listen without judgment.

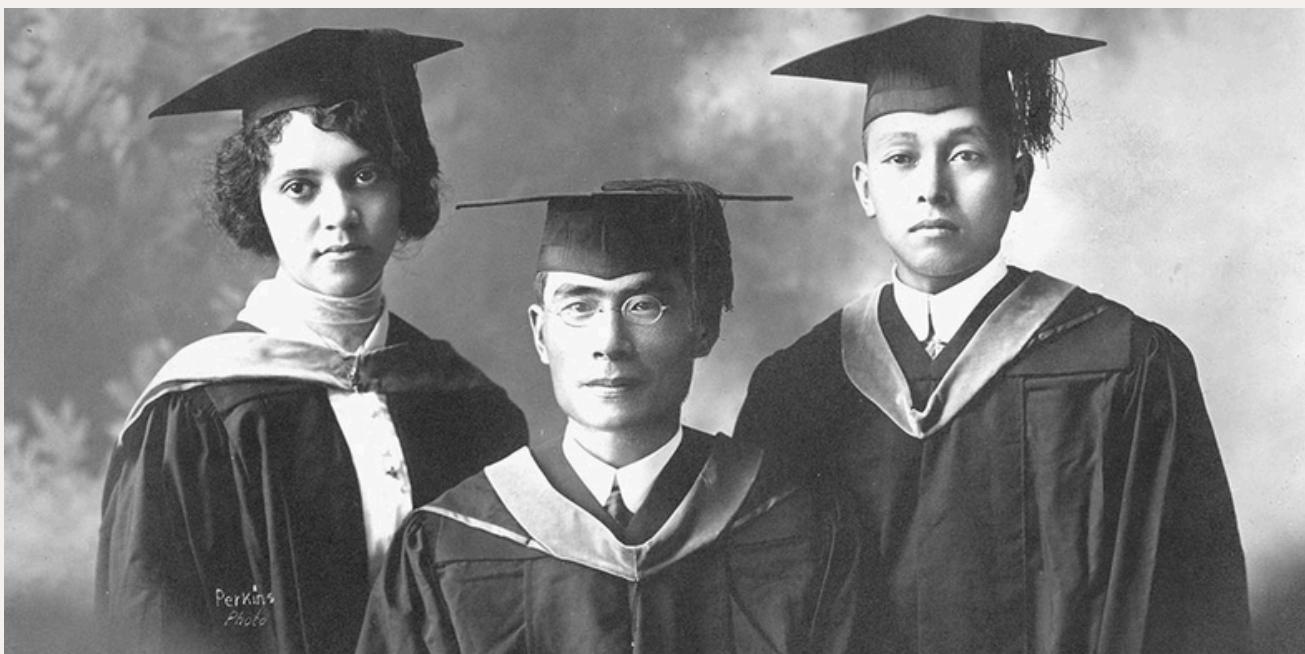
Talking openly with teens about boundaries, consent, and respectful behavior – and modeling those values ourselves – can make a lasting difference.

Help is available for anyone who needs it. Resources such as [Love is Respect](#) and the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) offer confidential support and guidance.

This February, let's celebrate relationships that lift us up, help us feel heard, and remind us that everyone deserves respect and care.



Alice Augusta Ball Day: A Legacy of Science and Healing



Photos courtesy of University of Hawai'i

February 28 is recognized as **Alice Augusta Ball Day**, honoring a brilliant chemist with Hawai'i ties whose work changed the course of medical treatment.

Alice Augusta Ball was a young scientist and educator at the College of Hawai'i (now the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa) when she developed the first effective treatment for Hansen's disease (leprosy) in the early 1900s. At a time when people with the disease were forcibly isolated, often for life, Ball's discovery offered new hope.

Chaulmoogra oil had long been explored as a potential treatment for Hansen's disease, but its thick, oily form made it difficult for the body to absorb and often caused severe side effects. Alice Ball developed an innovative process that transformed the oil into a water-soluble injectable treatment, allowing it to be safely absorbed into the bloodstream and making it the most effective therapy of its time.



Tragically, Ball died in 1916 at just 24 years old.

Alice Ball's story is one of scientific excellence, perseverance, and impact. Her work helped restore dignity and health to countless patients, and her legacy continues to inspire future generations of scientists, healers, and public health leaders in Hawai'i and beyond.

Hawai'i and the West Coast Health Alliance



The West Coast Health Alliance (WCHA), of which Hawai'i is a member, reaffirmed its vaccination guidance in alignment with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2026 Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule. The AAP is a trusted association of pediatricians dedicated to the well-being of children. Its science-based recommendations are endorsed by numerous health professional organizations representing more than one million providers. The 2026 schedule is generally unchanged from the 2025 schedule as there is no new credible evidence to justify changes.

AAP IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE

FACT CHECKING: VACCINE GUIDANCE

American Heart Month: Small Steps, Stronger Hearts



February is **American Heart Month**, a time to pause and show a little love to the vital organ that works nonstop for us. Heart health isn't about perfection. It's often the small, everyday choices that add up to stronger hearts and healthier communities.

Heart disease and stroke remain leading causes of illness in Hawai'i, with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities experiencing higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. These disparities highlight both long-standing challenges and powerful opportunities for prevention.

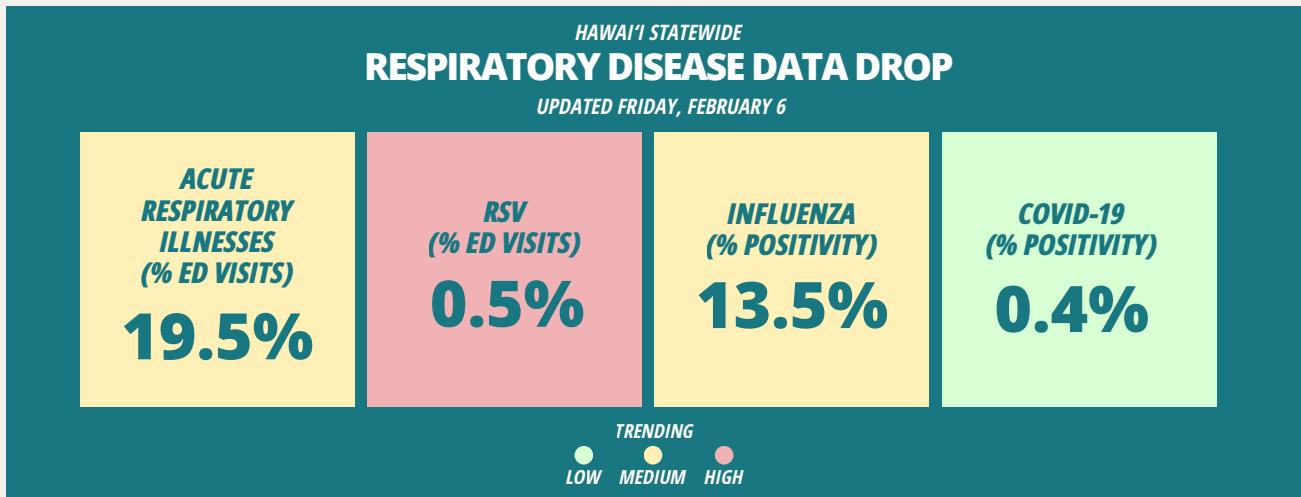
Simple habits and small changes can make a real difference: moving your body in ways you enjoy, choosing fresh and healthy traditional foods when possible, lowering and managing stress, and checking your blood pressure and cholesterol. Even short walks, home-cooked meals, or routine health visits help protect heart health over time.

The DOH supports heart health through programs focused on increasing access to healthy food and opportunities to be physically active, blood pressure control, cardiovascular disease prevention, and community education. This month, think progress, not perfection. One small step today can strengthen your heart for the future.

LIVE HEALTHY

EAT HEALTHY

This Week's RSV and COVID-19 Data



This week's data shows medium activity levels for acute respiratory illnesses (19.5% ED visits) and high activity for RSV (0.5% ED visits). Influenza (13.5% positivity) activity level is medium, and COVID-19 (0.4% positivity) activity level remains low.

[RESPIRATORY DISEASE DASHBOARD](#)

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

A Mental Health Check-In for Healing Hearts



The loss of a cherished relationship can be tough, whether the relationship lasted years or just a few months. Feelings of sadness, anger, relief, or loneliness are all normal, and healing doesn't follow a set timeline. Taking care of your mental health during times of heartbreak is an important act of self-care.

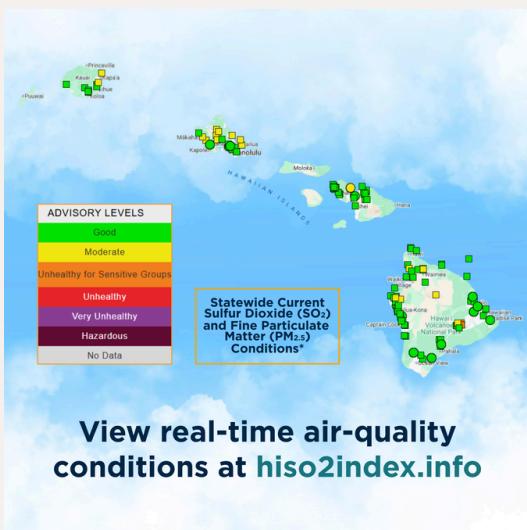
Healthy coping strategies can make a real difference. Staying connected with trusted friends, family, or community groups helps remind us we're not alone. Simple routines like getting enough sleep, moving your body, eating nourishing foods, or spending time outdoors can support emotional balance. Journaling, mindfulness, or creative outlets can also help process emotions in a healthy way.

If the pain feels overwhelming or begins to affect daily life, reaching out for professional support is a sign of strength. Hawai'i offers a range of behavioral health resources, including counseling services and crisis support. Healing takes time, but with compassion, connection, and support, it's possible to move forward with resilience and hope.

[MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT](#)

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Vog Awareness: Protecting Your Health During Volcanic Activity



Volcanic activity at Kīlauea can lead to periods of vog (volcanic smog) across Hawai'i. Vog forms when volcanic gases like sulfur dioxide (SO_2) react in the atmosphere, creating hazy air that can travel far from the source and affect communities statewide.

Exposure to vog may cause eye, nose, or throat irritation, coughing, headaches, or shortness of breath. People with asthma or other respiratory or heart conditions, children, kūpuna, pregnant individuals, and those who work or exercise outdoors may be more sensitive to its effects.

During vog conditions, DOH recommends reducing outdoor activity, staying indoors when possible, keeping windows and doors closed, and setting air conditioners to recirculate indoor air. Have medications readily available and contact a medical provider if symptoms worsen. While masks do not protect against volcanic gases, a well-fitting N95 may be useful for short-term cleanup of ash or volcanic debris such as Pele's hair (very thin strands of volcanic glass).

Staying informed about air quality and taking simple precautions can help protect you and your 'ohana when vog is present.

TRACK SO_2 AND $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ CONDITIONS

PREPARE FOR ERUPTION

PUBLIC HEALTH

Flu Season Update: Protect Yourself and Our Community



Seasonal influenza activity remains elevated nationally and in Hawai'i. The best defense remains a combination of simple, everyday actions. Annual flu vaccination remains the best way to reduce severe illness, missed work or school, and the spread of flu in our communities. It's not too late to get vaccinated this season.



You can also lower your risk by washing hands often, covering coughs and sneezes, improving indoor ventilation, and staying home when you're sick. These small steps help protect kūpuna, young children, and others at higher risk for complications.

Knowing when to seek care is also key. Most people with mild flu symptoms can recover at home with rest, fluids, and over-the-counter medications. Seek medical care promptly for severe symptoms like difficulty breathing, chest pain, confusion, persistent high fever, or dehydration – especially if you're in a high-risk group.

By taking preventive steps and using healthcare services wisely, we can stay healthier together and help keep emergency rooms and hospitals available for those who need them most.

FLU FACTS

SHORT TAKES

Mosquito-Borne Diseases: Rainy Season Reminder

What's going on with Zika and dengue viruses?



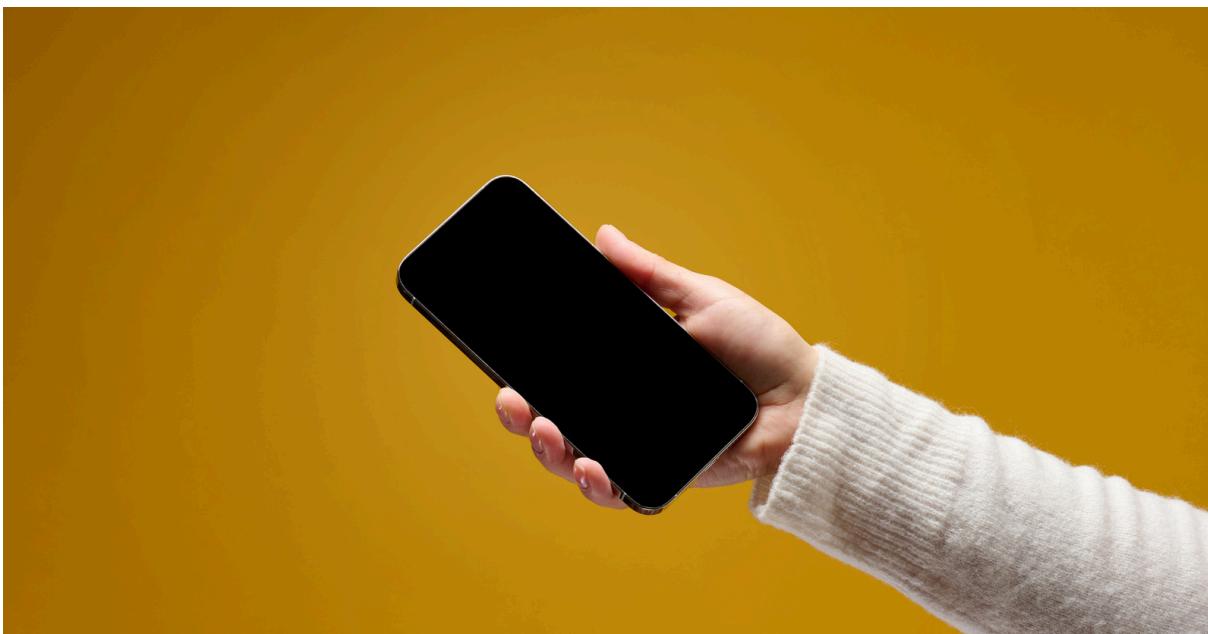
Recently, the DOH confirmed two separate travel-related cases of Zika and dengue virus. Dr. Sarah Kemble, State Epidemiologist, shares tips on how to stay safe and help prevent mosquito breeding sites.

With Hawai'i's rainy season creating more standing water, mosquito-borne diseases like [dengue and Zika](#) can spread more easily. A recent identification of these illnesses is a timely reminder to take simple precautions. Protect yourself by using EPA-approved insect repellent, wearing long sleeves when possible, and removing standing water around your home, such as in buckets, plant saucers, or clogged gutters. Mosquito control is a shared responsibility, and small actions can make a big difference. Staying aware and taking preventive steps helps protect not just you, but your 'ohana and community too.

DENGUE INFORMATION

ZIKA INFORMATION

From Phones to EVs: Lithium-Ion Battery Safety at Home



Lithium-ion batteries power many of today's everyday essentials, from tablets and smartphones to e-bikes, scooters, power tools, and mobility devices. As more households use these products, it's important to understand how to use, store, and dispose of batteries safely.

National fire data show that e-mobility devices, such as e-bikes and e-scooters, are among the most common sources of lithium-ion battery fires, often due to improper charging, damage, or disposal.

Household decision-makers play a key role in protecting families. Choose certified products, handle batteries with care, and watch for warning signs like overheating, swelling, or strange odors. Never throw lithium-ion batteries in the trash. Instead, cover the terminals and recycle them properly at approved locations to reduce fire risk and protect the environment. For disposal of EV's and larger batteries, contact your dealer for disposal options.

1. Safely remove lithium-ion batteries from devices, if possible.

2. Cover lithium battery terminals with non-metallic packing, duct, or electrical tape.



3. Individually bag each battery.

4. Drop off at designated collection sites, schedule for pick-up with authorized services, or turn in at collection facilities/events.

Lithium-ion batteries are everywhere, and when used responsibly, they make life easier and safer. A little awareness goes a long way in keeping Hawai'i's homes, communities, and waste systems safe.

BATTERY SAFETY

HOW TO DISPOSE OF BATTERIES

***Please note that our DOH Punchbowl offices will be closed on Monday, Feb. 16, in observance of Presidents' Day.**

INFORMATION HOTLINES

DOCD Disease Reporting Line

O'ahu (808) 586-4586
Maui (808) 984-8213
Kaua'i (808) 241-3563
Hilo (808) 933-0912
Kona (808) 322-4877

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

DOH Hotline

Get information & resources
Call (808) 586-4400

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.

