



PRESS RELEASE

Needham's Public Health Division Receives Three Food Safety Grant Awards from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

NEEDHAM, MA – (December 21, 2017) The Town of Needham is pleased to announce that its Public Health Division was recently awarded three grants to improve food safety and retail standards in the Town.

Awarded by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO) as part of the FDA's *Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards*, the three grants total nearly \$20,000 and represent some of the first awards that the Town has received to enhance regulatory standards and food protection.

The grant awards came across three program categories, and include funding to:

- educate and inform vendors (restaurants, school cafeterias, grocery stores) about food safety policies;
- provide Public Health Division staff members with additional food safety and inspectional trainings; and
- conduct a detailed risk factor assessment of five major foodborne illness risk factors which affect food establishments. This information will be utilized to create targeted solutions to improve Needham's Food Protection program.

"In the Public Health Division, it is our goal to be on the cutting edge with these important public health initiatives, including meeting the current Federal Food Code Standards," said Assistant Public Health Director Tara Gurge, the project lead.

"In the past six months, Needham has now received four awards from FDA totaling more than \$21,000," she continued. "In the previous seven years, the Town had not received any federal funding to support food inspections and revised Food Code assessment policies. With the current support in our Division, we can now make these important changes."

"This federal support will permit us to strengthen and improve our food inspection program and to implement the revised Food Code assessment policies," noted Edward Cosgrove, Ph.D., a member of Needham's Board of Health. "My thanks to Tara Gurge and the staff from the Public Health Division for securing these resources to make Needham a healthier and safer place."

These grants, and the training and technical assistance they provide, will enhance Needham's ability to ensure that food is handled, stored, and prepared safely, and that all possible safeguards are in place to prevent an outbreak of food-borne illnesses. The Public Health Division is excited to start working on these projects in 2018.

About the Needham Public Health Division

The Public Health Division is a component of the Town's Health & Human Services Department. Its mission, since 1877, has been to prevent and control the spread of disease, to address environmental issues, to promote healthy lifestyles, and to protect the public health and social well-being of all residents, especially the most vulnerable.

The Public Health Division assures that the food stored, prepared, and consumed in Needham is safe and properly handled through training, technical assistance, and rigorous inspections of its licensees, which include take-out and dine-in restaurants, grocery stores, hospitals, long-term care facilities, school cafeterias, and any other establishment which sells food products.

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