

LOCAL

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## Merced kicks off Binational Health Week

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Local officials kicked off Binational Health Week early this year with a presentation Wednesday about migrant health.

Binational Health Week will be officially observed over two weeks this year, from Saturday through Oct. 18, with a series of health events providing outreach, education and basic care to the underserved Latino population in Merced County. The focus will be on occupational health, access to health insurance, HIV education, influenza and diabetes, officials said.

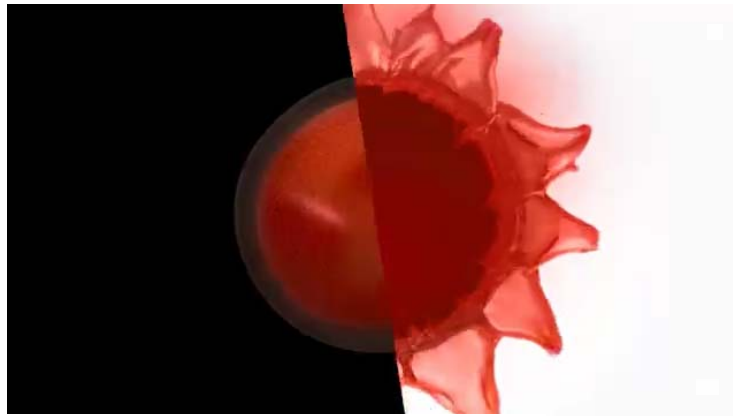
Dr. Jennie McLaurin, a child and migrant health specialist for the Migrant Clinicians Network, was the keynote speaker at Wednesday's presentation at Golden Valley Health Center in Merced.

McLaurin, a board-certified pediatrician, spoke about the health inequities and disparities she has witnessed in the migrant community throughout her 30-plus-year career. It is important, she said, for agricultural areas such as Merced County to help reduce barriers faced by the migrant community, such as language, transportation, unfamiliarity with local resources and food insecurities.

Food insecurities can lead to obesity, one of Merced County's leading health concerns, she said.

According to McLaurin, obesity is a reflection of food availability, which leads to the consumption of cheap and filling foods. Fifty percent of farmworker households experience food insecurities, she said.

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Farmworkers' poor living conditions and limited access to running water also contribute to their health risks, McLaurin said.

During last year's Binational Health Week, officials helped organize 2,290 health services in Merced County, including 750 flu shots; 493 blood-pressure checks; and vision, dental and hearing screenings. All services are free and no documentation is needed, officials explained.

Committee member Cesar Garcia, of Golden Valley Health Centers, said it is groups such as the farmworker population whom organizers want to serve with these health fairs.

"My hope, in the 11 years that I've been doing this, has always been to connect those people who are underserved with the available services. We want them to get their health needs met," Garcia said. "People might see the (health care) buildings, but they also need to see the humans inside those buildings to feel comfortable."

Events planned in Merced County during Binational Health Week include:

- Oct. 9 – Atwater Flea Market health screenings, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2877 Atwater Blvd.
- Oct. 9 – Planada Health Fair, 4 to 7 p.m., San Joaquin Drug, 9215 California 140.
- Oct. 10 – Los Banos Flea Market health screenings, 4 to 8 p.m., 403 F St.
- Oct. 10 – Atwater Migrant Camp health screenings, 5 to 8 p.m., 9200 Westside Blvd.
- Oct. 16 – Livingston Community Health Fair, 4 to 8 p.m., Livingston High School, 1617 Main St.
- Oct. 19 – Merced City Health

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