

GEORGIA EAST METRO MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS

NEWSLETTER

Judee Levinson receives the President's Lifetime Achievement Award.



Mission Ready:
MRC GEM Volunteers in Action



MRC GEM kicked off 2026 with an important focus on protection and prevention. Our January training featured Cybersecurity, led by Dr. Sean Graham, and Infrastructure Hardening, led by Thomas Campbell.

Participants explored practical strategies to defend against cyberattacks and data breaches while strengthening physical and digital safeguards.

A Hero Among Us MRC GEM Volunteer Spotlight Featuring:
Celebrating Our 2025 Volunteer Honorees

During the December 2025 Volunteer Recognition Holiday Luncheon, MRC GEM proudly honored the extraordinary individuals who embody the spirit of service, leadership, and commitment within our organization.

Inducted into the MRC GEM Hall of Fame were Jean Angus, Suleima Salgado, and Deborah Newell, recognized for their extraordinary and lasting contributions.

The MVP – Maximum Volunteer Presence Award was presented to Tia Milton, Esq., Liza Oneal, and Dr. Stacia Wilson for their exceptional commitment throughout the year.

In addition, Judee Levinson received the prestigious President's Lifetime Achievement Award for her impact and years of service.

We are grateful for these inspiring leaders and volunteers.



Jean Angus



Suleima Salgado



Deborah Newell



Dr. Stacia Wilson



Tia Milton, Esq.



Liza Oneal

MRC-GEM is an all-volunteer nonprofit whose mission is to augment community health operations during large-scale emergencies, aid response to pressing health care needs, and improve community emergency preparedness. Our volunteers speak over 70 different languages and dialects, allowing us to serve Georgia's Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale Counties, a highly diverse population of well over 1.2 million people. COVID is a perfect example.

Heroes aren't born. They Volunteer!

The Preparedness Pot: Insight & Inside MRC GEM

Where we stir together timely updates, expert insights, and must-know information to keep you ready and in the know.

To Vax or Not to Vax, That is the Question



Sang Nguyen, MPH
Immunization Health Educator

Measles elimination in the United States is a key achievement, and vaccines continue to reduce deaths and disabilities from vaccine-preventable diseases (World Health Organization, n.d.; World Health Organization, 2024; Zhou, 2024). However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a worldwide setback, with both children and adults opting out or missing recommended vaccines. With community members opting out of critical vaccines, measles has been spreading in unvaccinated communities across the U.S., with 2276 cases in 2025 and 733 in 2026. Measles vaccination rates must be at least 95% to prevent the spread of measles, but in Georgia, the current rate is 88.4%. Low measles vaccination rates could indicate low routine childhood vaccination rates, placing our communities at risk of diseases such as chickenpox and pertussis (whooping cough). Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale counties are no exception to this setback.

The Immunization Program Team at Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale (GNR) Public Health, which provides essential public health services for over 1.2 million residents in Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale counties, conducts annual immunization record audits for childcare facilities, Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, 7th grade, and 11th grade. Since the 2022-2023 school year, student compliance with school-based vaccination requirements has gradually declined across all three counties. Interestingly, compliance is highest among our youngest students in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten, but steadily drops as students advance to higher grades. We expect religious affidavits to remain steady; however, the Immunization Program team noticed sharp increases across all grade levels, with 11th-grade affidavits showing the highest increase. The Immunization Team is investigating what is driving the rise in religious exemptions and the decline in student compliance. Lower student vaccination rates could mean lower vaccine uptake in the community, increasing the risk of spread of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), and Varicella (Chickenpox).

The Immunization Team's preliminary community assessment data indicate that community members still largely believe that vaccines provide significant benefits; however, a growing number are neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing that vaccines are necessary, even when the disease is no longer common. Community members frequently choosing this neutral option suggests that some may have forgotten how vaccines work. The community assessment is ongoing and is expected to provide valuable data to support evidence-based practices. In the meantime, it's up to everyone to engage in conversations that rebuild knowledge and trust in vaccines. Stay tuned for the next article to learn what the GNR Public Health Immunization Program is doing to improve vaccination rates.

1. Vaccines and immunization. Accessed December 4, 2025. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/vaccines-and-immunization>
2. Zhou F. Health and Economic Benefits of Routine Childhood Immunizations in the Era of the Vaccines for Children Program — United States, 1994–2023. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2024;73. doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm7331a2
3. World Health Organization. Global immunization efforts have saved at least 154 million lives over the past 50 years. 34 2024. Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-04-2024-global-immunization-efforts-have-saved-at-least-154-million-lives-over-the-past-50-years>
4. CDC. Measles Cases and Outbreaks. Measles (Rubeola). September 16, 2025. Accessed September 23, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

TRAINING CORNER:
SHARPEN YOUR SKILLS

<u>Opioid Awareness, Vaccine-Preventable Diseases, and Vaccine Hesitancy).</u>	February 21, 2026
<u>First Aid/ Stop the Bleed</u>	March 21, 2026
<u>AHA BLS CPR/AED Certification</u>	April 18, 2026
<u>Fire Training Academy Tour</u>	May 16, 2026
<u>Annual Volunteer Summit - Members Only</u>	June 6- June 7, 2026

Unless otherwise noted, programs are on the third Saturday of each month, from 9 AM to 12 noon, at GNR Public Health 2570 Riverside Parkway, Lawrenceville, GA 30046.

Members' guests and prospective members are welcome to join us on a space-available basis for most programs.

Attention Please...
The 2026 training schedule is now available!

To add events to your calendar or to find out more about upcoming member events, Click the link below:



MRC GEM Schedule

Got a Story to Share?

We'd love to hear from you! If you would like to submit an article to be considered for the MRC GEM Newsletter, please email Stacia Wilson at stacia@mrcgem.com. Your contributions help keep our community informed, engaged, and prepared!
#MRCGEM #StayConnected

Upcoming Training Resources

The CDC provides a brief overview of the opioid overdose epidemic, including its impact and contributing factors.

Understanding the Opioid Overdose Epidemic
CDC is committed to fighting the opioid overdose epidemic and supporting states and communities.
Overdose Prevention / Jul 12, 2025

The information presented on this page represents confirmed measles cases reported to the CDC.

Measles Cases and Outbreaks
Find the latest numbers of confirmed U.S. measles cases. CDC updates this page weekly.
Measles (Rubeola) / Feb 12

More information about first aid steps for severe bleeding:

Severe bleeding: First aid
How to administer first aid for severe bleeding.
Mayo Clinic

January and February Preparedness

Stay prepared year-round with free tools from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Click each link below for a quick list of activities to keep you and your family ready.

Winter Ready. Jan is all about staying winter-ready. Please click the link to find resources to help you understand winter risk. https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/ready-gov_2026-preparedness-calendar.pdf

Food Ready. Feb is National Canned Food Month. Please click the link to find resources about the Suggested emergency food supplies needed. <https://www.ready.gov/food>



Flu season is not over yet. Click the video below to stay informed.



To find more resources and information shared during National Preparedness Month, please click the link below :

<https://www.ready.gov>

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES Call 1-866-PUB-HLTH anytime, 24/7.

Heroes aren't born. They Volunteer!

Stronger Together:
MRC & Partners in Preparedness
COMMUNITY & CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS



Your Kroger Plus Card can help support our programs at no cost to you. Go to [Community Rewards](#) to enroll your card in support of MRC GEM. After registering your Kroger Plus Card, search for MRC GEM (org. #JI419) and select us as your supported organization. Once you do, Kroger will donate a percentage of what you spend to MRC GEM.

THANK YOU

Click each logo to learn more !



Support MRC GEM every time you shop. Donate spare change by automatically rounding up your orders to the nearest dollar at checkout. Go to [Walmart Spark Good](#) for more information and to enroll in the program.



"Empower our community's emergency preparedness—your donation today helps build a safer, more resilient tomorrow."

<https://mrcgem.com/donate>

We are pleased to recognize our valued donors in these ways:

For a donation of \$ 1000 or more, the donor's name and logo will be displayed as a Principal Sponsor at all meetings as well as on the donor web page. Your donation will provide a weekend of in-depth training for 4 or more volunteers.

For a donation of \$ 500 – \$ 999, the donor's name and logo will be displayed as Sustaining Sponsor at one monthly meeting and on our donor web page. Your donation will provide a weekend of in-depth training for 2 – 4 volunteers.

Supporting (\$ 250 – \$ 499) and Preparedness (up to \$ 249) donors will be recognized on our donor web page. Your donation will help us provide regular monthly training sessions for our volunteers.

Stronger Together

MRC GEM (East Metro Health District Medical Reserve Corps, Inc.) is a Georgia non-profit corporation with IRS 501(c)(3) approval. Donations are tax-deductible as provided by the Federal and State tax codes.

Your gift, no matter how large or small, helps us make our community a safer place for all of us. Since we are an independent nonprofit with no paid staff, we depend entirely on the generosity of donors like you. Every penny you donate goes directly to fulfilling our mission.

You can donate cash directly and conveniently through the PayPal giving fund using your credit card or PayPal account. The full donation amount comes to us; PayPal charges no fee for this service.

To verify us directly with the IRS, click the link below:

<https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>

Search for EIN 26-1280067.



If you prefer to mail a check, please make it out to "MRC GEM" and mail to:
MRC GEM
2700 Braselton Hwy, Ste 10-193
Dacula, GA 30019-3262

Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

Donate



<https://www.paypal.com/fundraiser/charity/63682>

If you have any questions about donating, please email us at donations@mrcgem.com

We appreciate your interest and support.

An All
VOLUNTEER
Organization

Visit our website to find out more about becoming a MRC GEM volunteer.
Become an MRC GEM HERO TODAY!

mrcgem.com/join



Find us on Social Media

