

the Pulse

Fall 2026

A Fresh Start *for* Fall!

Great routines for
healthy living

Keeping your
athletes safe and
strong all season

From Harvest to Health

Let's eat our
veggies!

Plus: When to go
to primary care
vs. the ER

VBCH Primary
Care Doctor

*Dana R.
Brecount, DO*

Preventative
Screenings
Matter at
Every Age





Dana R. Brecount, DO

Preventive Screenings Matter at Every Age

Preventive screenings are one of the simplest and most powerful ways to protect your health. Whether you are a child, a busy adult, or enjoying your later years, routine checkups and screenings help catch concerns early—often before symptoms appear—when they may be easier to treat. Preventive care is not just about finding problems. It is about building a strong foundation for lifelong health.

At Van Buren County Hospital, our providers encourage patients and families to think of screenings as a regular part of life, just like school physicals, dental appointments, sports schedules, and annual checkups. Every age and stage brings different health needs, and staying on top of recommended screenings can help patients feel more confident, informed, and supported.

For children and teens, preventive care often includes well-child visits, growth and development checks, immunizations, hearing and vision screenings, dental care, mental health conversations, and sports physicals. These visits help families make sure kids are growing, learning, and staying on track. They also give parents a chance to ask questions, talk through concerns, and partner with a provider who understands their child's health history.





Dr. Dana Brecount knows firsthand how full family life can be. As a physician, wife, and mom of three, she understands that schedules can fill up quickly. She and her husband have two boys and a little girl who keep them on the move. Her boys are active in sports, especially wrestling, baseball, running, and Dr. Brecount enjoys staying active right alongside them. Whether she is running with the boys or bringing little Elsie along in the stroller, she knows that keeping a family healthy takes planning, commitment, and support.

“As a physician and a mom, I know how easy it is to put off appointments when life gets busy. But screenings give us peace of mind and help us catch small concerns before they become bigger problems,” said Dr. Brecount.

Dr. Brecount encourages families to make preventive care a normal part of their routine. Her own children are a great example of how wellness visits, immunizations, dental cleanings, vision checks, and sports physicals can help kids stay healthy, safe, and ready for school, activities, and everyday life. For young athletes, sports physicals are especially important because they help identify any concerns before the season begins and make sure children are ready to participate safely.

For adults, screenings become even more important. Blood pressure checks, cholesterol testing, diabetes screening, cancer screenings, mental health screenings, and annual wellness visits can help identify health risks early. These visits also create an opportunity to talk with your provider about family history, lifestyle, medications, stress,

sleep, nutrition, exercise, and any changes you may be noticing in your health.

Many adults are busy caring for children, working full-time, helping aging parents, and managing everyday responsibilities. It can be tempting to put your own health last. But preventive screenings are one of the best ways to stay active and present for the people who depend on you. Taking time for your health today can help prevent bigger health concerns tomorrow.

As we age, preventive care continues to play a major role in quality of life. Older adults may need continued cancer screenings, bone density checks, fall-risk assessments, medication reviews, hearing and vision screenings, and vaccines. These visits help support independence, safety, mobility, and overall well-being. They also help patients and providers work together to manage chronic conditions and maintain the best quality of life possible.

“Preventive care is not about expecting something to be wrong—it is about giving yourself the best chance to stay healthy, active, and present for the people and moments that matter most,” said Dr. Brecount.

The bottom line is simple: screenings are not just for when you feel sick. They are part of staying well. Every phase of life brings different health needs, and regular preventive care helps you and your provider stay one step ahead.

Give us a call today at Van Buren County Hospital to learn what screenings you or your family may be due for and get scheduled. **Call 319-293-8732 for more information and to schedule your appointment. ■**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO



GAREN CARPENTER, CEO

Healthy Habits for a Stronger Season Ahead

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As we move into the fall season, our community returns to routine, making it the perfect time to refocus on health and prevention.

This issue highlights simple ways to stay healthy, from keeping student-athletes safe during fall sports to understanding concussion awareness and injury prevention. We also explore how seasonal eating and proper hydration can support overall wellness as the weather changes.

Back-to-school season is a key time to stay current on immunizations and schedule preventive checkups. These steps help identify concerns early and keep families prepared for the months ahead. Knowing when to visit your primary care provider versus the emergency room is also an important part of making informed healthcare decisions.

At Van Buren County Hospital, we are committed to supporting your health through prevention, education and access to care. This fall, let routine be your reminder to prioritize your well-being.



Fall Sports Safety:



Keeping High School Athletes Strong All Season

Fall is one of the busiest and most exciting times for high school athletics. From football under the Friday night lights to volleyball, cross country, soccer, and cheer, student-athletes are back in motion. With packed schedules and multiple sports in full swing, safety and injury prevention are essential to keeping athletes healthy all season long.

► Common Risks Across Fall Sports

Each sport carries its own risks, but many injuries are shared across all fall athletics. Sprains, strains, overuse injuries, and dehydration are common, especially as athletes transition from summer to more structured practices. Sudden increases in activity levels can put stress on muscles and joints, increasing the chance of injury.

Proper conditioning before the season starts is key. Athletes should gradually build strength, endurance, and flexibility to prepare their bodies for the demands of competition.

► Concussion Awareness: Know the Signs

Concussions are a serious concern in contact sports like football and soccer, but they can happen in any activity. Recognizing symptoms early is critical. Warning signs include headache, dizziness, confusion, nausea, and sensitivity to light or noise.

If a concussion is suspected, the athlete should be removed from play immediately and evaluated by a healthcare professional. Returning too soon increases the risk of more serious injury and longer recovery times.

► Preventing Injuries Through Preparation

Warm-ups and stretching are essential for all athletes. Dynamic stretching before activity and proper cool-down routines afterward help reduce muscle strain and improve flexibility. Strength training, especially for core stability and joint support, can also help prevent injuries.

Wearing the right equipment is equally important. Properly fitted shoes, sport-specific gear, and protective equipment can significantly reduce the risk of injury.

► Hydration and Recovery Matter

Even as temperatures begin to cool, hydration remains critical. Dehydration can lead to fatigue, decreased performance, and increased injury risk. Athletes should drink water regularly before, during, and after practices and games.

Rest is just as important as training. Busy schedules can lead to overuse injuries if athletes do not allow their bodies time to recover. Getting enough sleep and taking rest days when needed helps prevent burnout and keeps athletes performing at their best.

► Supporting Safe & Healthy Athletes

Sports Physicals are a requirement of all junior high and high school athletes prior to beginning competition. At Van Buren County Hospital, we offer FREE sports physicals to athletes every summer on two designated dates to prepare them for the upcoming season. This year these dates are being held on July 24th from 8am-noon and July 31st from 9am-4pm in the Community Services Center on the Van Buren Hospital Campus.

If you missed these dates, you can call our scheduling line to get set up in our clinic to complete your sports physical. There is a small fee for this visit, many times your insurance will cover this. If you aren't sure, we can help! Call **319-293-8732** to set up an appointment before sports get started in the fall! ■



Mindy Danielson,
ARNP
Family Practice

Eating Healthy This Fall: Seasonal Vegetables for Better Health

Fall is the perfect time to refocus on healthy eating. Seasonal vegetables are at their peak, offering fresh flavor, strong nutrition and an easy way to support overall wellness.

Eating with the seasons helps you get the most out of your meals. Fall vegetables are often more affordable, nutrient-rich and versatile. Options like sweet potatoes and squash provide fiber and vitamin A, while broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower offer vitamin C and support digestion. Leafy greens such as kale and spinach remain great sources of essential nutrients.

Healthy eating can be simple. Try roasting vegetables with olive oil and herbs, adding them to soups or



pairing them with lean protein and whole grains for balanced meals.

As colder months approach, nutrition plays an important role in supporting energy and immune health. Small, consistent choices can make a big difference.

Fall is a natural time to reset habits. By choosing fresh, seasonal foods, you can support your health and feel your best all season long. ■

HYDRATION IN THE FALL: MYTH VS. FACTS

When temperatures drop, many people assume hydration becomes less important. In reality, staying hydrated in the Fall is just as critical as it is in the summer.



MYTH: You don't need as much water when it's cooler.

FACT: Your body still loses fluids through breathing, sweating and daily activity, even in cooler weather. You may not feel as thirsty, but your hydration needs remain the same.

MYTH: Only water counts toward hydration.

FACT: While water is best, other options like herbal teas, milk and water-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables can also help keep you hydrated.

MYTH: You'll feel thirsty when you need water.

FACT: Thirst is not always an early sign of dehydration. By the time you feel thirsty, your body may already need fluids.

Fall activities like outdoor sports, yard work and busy schedules can increase your risk of dehydration without you realizing it. Dry indoor air from heating systems can also contribute to fluid loss.

The best approach is to stay consistent. Drink water throughout the day, carry a reusable bottle and pay attention to signs like fatigue or dry skin.

Hydration supports energy, focus and overall health year-round. Even as the weather changes, your body still depends on it. ■

► **For more information on staying healthy and hydrated this season give our dietitian a call, she is happy to help with any needs related to food and nutrition at 319-293-3171 ext. 1351.**



Elizabeth Wilson
VBCH Dietitian

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), American Heart Association (AHA), Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine



Back to Routine, Back to Health:

a Fresh Start for Fall

▼ **As summer winds down** and schedules begin to shift, the return to routine offers more than just a change in pace. It creates an opportunity to reset healthy habits, prioritize preventive care and prepare families for a strong, healthy season ahead. From back-to-school checklists to immunizations and annual wellness visits, fall is one of the most important times of year to refocus on health.

Why Routine Matters for Health

Summer often brings flexible schedules, later nights and less structure. While that break can be refreshing, it can also disrupt sleep patterns, eating habits and regular medical care.

Returning to a routine helps restore consistency, which is essential for both physical and mental health.

For children, routines support better sleep, improved focus in school and stronger immune systems. For adults, they create space to prioritize preventive care, manage chronic conditions and stay on track with overall wellness goals. Establishing a steady routine early in the fall can set the tone for the entire season.

Back-to-School Health Essentials

The start of the school year is a natural checkpoint for families. It is the perfect time to make sure children are physically and mentally ready for the demands of the classroom and extracurricular activities.

Annual physicals and sports physicals are key. These visits help identify any underlying health concerns, ensure growth and development are on track and provide an opportunity to discuss nutrition, sleep and activity levels.

Vision and hearing screenings are equally important. Undetected issues in these areas can affect learning, concen-

tration and overall academic performance. Addressing them early helps children succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Parents should also review medications, allergies and emergency plans with schools to ensure children are supported throughout the day.

Immunization Awareness: Protecting Your Family and Community

August marks Immunization Awareness Month, making it an ideal time to review recommended vaccines for children, teens and adults. Vaccinations play a critical role in preventing the spread of illness and protecting those who are most vulnerable.

For school-aged children, staying up to date on required immunizations helps prevent outbreaks of diseases such as measles, whooping cough and influenza. For adolescents, vaccines like HPV and meningitis offer long-term protection against serious health conditions.

Adults should not overlook their own immunization needs. Seasonal flu vaccines, updated COVID-19 vaccines and boosters like tetanus are important for maintaining protection. Staying current not only protects individuals but also helps safeguard the broader community.

The Role of Preventive Checkups

Preventive care is one of the most effective ways to maintain long-term health. Routine checkups allow healthcare providers to monitor key health indicators, identify concerns early and provide guidance tailored to each individual.

Annual wellness visits typically include blood pressure checks, lab work, screenings and discussions about lifestyle habits such as diet, exercise and sleep. These visits are an opportunity to ask questions, address concerns and build a relationship with your healthcare provider.

For individuals managing chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure or asthma, fall is a critical time to ensure treatment plans are working effectively before the colder months begin.

Building Healthy Habits for the Season Ahead

Returning to routine is not just about appointments. It is also about daily habits that support overall well-being. Sleep should be a top priority. Establishing consistent bedtimes and limiting screen time before bed can improve sleep quality for both children and adults. Adequate rest supports immune function, mood and cognitive performance.

Nutrition also plays a key role. Packing balanced lunches, incorporating fruits and vegetables into meals and limiting

processed foods can help maintain energy levels throughout the day. Staying hydrated, even as temperatures cool, is equally important.

Physical activity should remain part of the routine. Whether it is sports, walking, or active play, regular movement supports physical health and reduces stress.

Mental Health and Routine

The transition back to school and structured schedules can be both exciting and stressful. Students may face academic pressure, social changes or anxiety about new environments. Adults may also feel the shift as routines become more demanding.

“Small steps taken now can prevent larger health concerns later.”

Creating space for open communication is essential. Checking in regularly with children and teens about how they are feeling can help identify concerns early. Encouraging balance between school, activities and downtime supports mental well-being.

For those experiencing ongoing stress or anxiety, speaking with a healthcare provider can provide valuable support and resources.

A Strong Start to a Healthy Season

Fall is more than a return to routine. It is a chance to reset priorities and take proactive steps toward better health. By scheduling preventive visits, staying up to date on immunizations and building consistent daily habits, families can enter the season prepared and confident.

Small steps taken now can prevent larger health concerns later. Whether it is a checkup, a vaccine or a simple adjustment to daily habits, each action contributes to a healthier future.

As routines settle in, remember that health is not just something to manage when problems arise. It is something to invest in every day.



Dr. Dana Brecount
Primary Care
Provider

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine



Congratulations to the Van Buren County Hospital team on achieving 365 days with no patient falls — an incredible accomplishment that reflects our commitment to safety, teamwork, and quality care!



When to Go to the ER vs. Clinic: A GUIDE FOR RURAL RESIDENTS

Living in a rural community often means longer travel times and fewer healthcare options, making it important to know where to go when you need care. Choosing the right setting can save time, reduce costs, and ensure you receive the appropriate level of treatment. When in doubt, seek emergency care, but for everyday health concerns, your clinic is often the fastest and most appropriate choice.

GO TO THE ER IF YOU HAVE:

CHEST PAIN OR PRESSURE

TROUBLE BREATHING

SIGNS OF STROKE

SEVERE INJURIES OR BROKEN BONES

HEAVY OR UNCONTROLLED BLEEDING

LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

SEVERE BURNS

GO TO THE CLINIC IF YOU HAVE:

COLD, FLU, OR MILD FEVER

SORE THROAT OR EAR PAIN

MINOR CUTS OR SPRAINS

ROUTINE CHECKUPS OR SCREENINGS

ANNUAL WELLNESS VISITS

CHRONIC CONDITION MANAGEMENT

TIP: WHEN UNSURE, CALL YOUR LOCAL CLINIC. THEY CAN HELP GUIDE YOU TO THE RIGHT CARE.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institutes of Health (NIH), American Heart Association, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Johns Hopkins Medicine