

# Board of Health

Monthly Report- July/August 2002

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 We welcome your comments and suggestions for the Board Report at [board@healthunit.org](mailto:board@healthunit.org)

## Tobacco Bylaw Advocacy Update

*Submitted by Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health*

As of July 8th we have made presentations on the topic of tobacco bylaw development to all 24 municipal councils served by the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. In addition, we have participated in community consultation forums for the municipalities of Brockville, Elizabethtown/Kitley, and Smiths Falls, and in presentations made to the Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce, the Brockville Rotary Club, and the Prescott Chamber of Commerce. We are expecting to make more presentations in the weeks and months to come, including a public consultation forum for the municipality of Edwardsburgh Cardinal, and the municipalities of Perth, Bathurst/Burgess/Sherbrook, and Drummond/North Elmsley. At this point the municipalities of Brockville and Elizabethtown/Kitley are considering how they will continue to conduct their review on tobacco bylaw development.



There has been a great deal of support for this initiative from our community partners, including hospital boards, community health centers, member agencies of the Tri-health Team (the Heart Health coalition for the tricounty), and from the medical societies and medical advisory committees of our district.

Support and leadership from members of the community will continue to be essential as the communities within Lanark, Leeds and Grenville review and address the topic of public protection from the health hazards of environmental tobacco smoke. The development of strong tobacco bylaws to prevent exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in indoor public places and workplaces is of critical importance to the health of the population.

Please visit our website for more information at [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org), or contact me or Yves Decoste, the health unit Tobacco Coordinator at 345-5685, or 1-800-660-5853.

## Tri-County Planning for a Pandemic Influenza Out-break

Submitted by Jane Futcher, Director Clinical Services and Laurie O'Reilly, Public Health Nurse

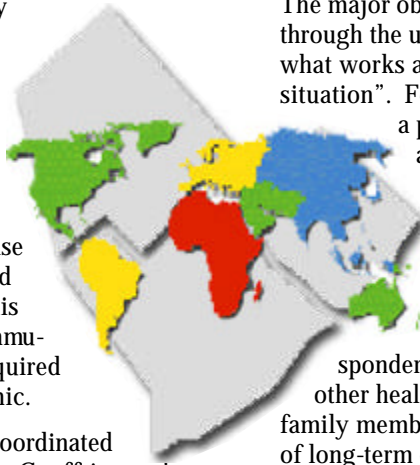
On June 18 2002, 45 health, emergency service and municipal staff from the tri-county area arrived at the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit in Brockville to participate in a table-top exercise intended to test the local 'Contingency Plan for Pandemic Influenza'. Representatives from area agencies came to "play" their roles in response to a mock community emergency caused by a large-scale influenza out-break. This was the opportunity to bring all the community partners together who would be required to respond in the event of a true pandemic.

Laurie O'Reilly, Public Health Nurse, coordinated the exercise in consultation with Phillippe Geoffrion and Dave Clarke from Emergency Measures Ontario.

Pandemic influenza occurs when the influenza virus undergoes major changes such that the population has no immunity. Pandemics have occurred at irregular intervals throughout history. Experts agree that another pandemic is very likely, if not inevitable, although it is difficult to predict when the next one will occur. The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 was the most notable in history resulting in over 20 million deaths worldwide. It occurred around the time of WW I and infected over half the world's population. Since 1918, there have been other, less severe, influenza pandemics in 1957 and 1968. It was felt that the "Chicken Flu" identified in Hong Kong in 1997 had the potential of causing a pandemic. However, increased surveillance allowed the virus to be identified early. In order to control further infection, millions of chickens believed to be harboring the virus were slaughtered. Many consider the emergence of this 'new' virus to be one of the most worrisome medical events of the day.

Since then, the World Health Organization (WHO), federal, provincial and local health agencies have been involved in preparation for the next pandemic. The Health Unit assembled a committee in March 2001 as a way to ensure a coordinated response throughout the tri-county area.

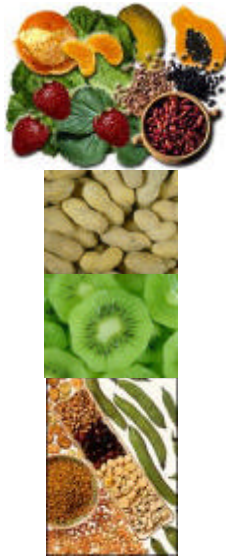
The 'Contingency Plan for Pandemic Influenza' is intended to be the framework that connects all local emergency response plans. Every agency and municipality can see where their plans complement each others', where they can make modifications, where they can offer help and give support to other agencies, and combine resources and work together. In this way, the tri-counties can work as "one unit" in such an emergency.



The major objective of the exercise was to test the plan through the use of a mock scenario in order to discover what works and what doesn't work well in a "real life situation". For this particular day, our situation covered a period of 4-6 weeks, from the initial appearance of a "new virus" in China to its arrival in Leeds, Grenville & Lanark. Initially no vaccine was available because it usually takes approximately 4-6 months to manufacture the vaccine for a new virus. As to be expected, the scenario included the absence of 25% of police, fire and emergency responders due to illness, half the hospital staff and other health care workers were ill or home looking after family members in the mock scenario. The expanded use of long-term care facilities was identified as a way to ease the load felt by the hospitals. Mortuaries were feeling pressured, as their staff was also running at a minimum. In the exercise scenario, this virus infected 120,000 residents in the tri-county area, 27,200 people required outpatient care, 480 people required hospitalization and 176 people died.

It was an excellent learning experience for all who attended the day. Several improvements and modifications were identified for the community plan. Individual agencies have also identified areas where their internal plans could be modified to complement others'. As the plan is a "living" document, exercises such as this one will be repeated regularly to ensure that changes in the community are reflected in the plan.





## It's Never Too Early for a Folic Acid Campaign

*Submitted by Barb Guthrie, Public Health Nurse*

'It's Never Too Early'. That's the slogan for the folic acid campaign across Ontario. The campaign was developed by the Folic Acid Alliance\* and materials have been supplied to health units for our use in promoting the use of folic acid.

Folic acid is a B vitamin. It is called folate in its natural form in foods. Research has identified folic acid as being effective in reducing the rate of neural tube defects by 70 %. Currently neural tube defects affect one in every 1,300 births in Canada.

To be effective in preventing neural tube defects, folic acid should be started 2-3 months before pregnancy and continued throughout the first trimester of pregnancy. It is considered necessary to take a daily supplement of 0.4 mg folic acid in addition to making healthy food choices.

Recent research has shown that only 42% of women in Ontario between the ages of 18 and 45 know that folic acid may help prevent a child from being born with a neural tube defect. And only 38% of these women know that folic acid must be taken before pregnancy to be effective.

The slogan "It's Never Too Early" underlines the message that women need to be taking folic acid before pregnancy. Because almost half of pregnancies are unplanned, our challenge is to make all women who could become pregnant, and not just those planning pregnancies aware of folic acid.

The Folic Acid Alliance is conducting a multi-faceted public education and awareness campaign that will target women 18-45 years of age. Our Health Unit's folic acid campaign strategies include newspaper articles, radio ads, media interviews, public service announcements, and a poster campaign in fitness centres and clinics.

It's never too early.



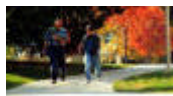
\* The Folic Acid Alliance is a partnership including The Easter Seal Society; The Fetal Centre at the Hospital for Sick Children; Best Start- Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre; The Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario; and The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health.

## Wellness in the Workplace

*Submitted by Danielle Shewfelt, Public Health Nurse*



Workplace wellness is important to all employees and to their employers as well. The relationship between employee and employer works both ways. Employers benefit from having healthy employees and a healthy workplace, and employees benefit from having employers who provide a supportive and healthy work environment.



For this reason, the Health Unit has formed a Workplace Wellness Task Force to look at the needs of employees and to develop a plan to increase workplace wellness. This task force will establish a standing committee to implement the Workplace Wellness Program.

The Health Unit has a great deal of expertise in a variety of health topics. Tapping into this wealth of knowledge will create a comprehensive program. This program can serve as an example for other workplaces as well. Other workplaces will be able to use this tool and modify it to meet their own individual needs.

It is hoped that by developing an effective Workplace Wellness Program, this will enhance the Health Unit's ability to promote health to the large number of workplaces in the community, therefore having a much stronger impact on overall employee health in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark.

If you would like more information on workplace health, please contact Danielle Shewfelt, Public Health Nurse at 613-256-1203.

## United Counties Youth Dental Treatment Fund

*Submitted by Robin Cleary, Dental Hygienist*



The Dental Program of the Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Department has received \$15,000 funding from the National Child Benefit Reinvestment Program. These funds will be used to continue to deliver the Leeds & Grenville Youth Dental Treatment Program throughout the United Counties. This program is available to youth who meet the essential dental criteria; pain is present or may become present due to current dental conditions. A declaration of need is required to be signed by either the parents or the youth, stating that the youth does not have any type of dental coverage and obtaining dental treatment would place a financial hardship on the family.

The age limit for the Youth Dental Program has been extended to 21 years of age. In the past the age group eligible for dental coverage was 14 to 19 years of age.

We were also successful in having \$2000 of this funding designated for adults in need of emergency dental treatment, as the need for this age is growing. There has been a maximum of \$100 per adult allotted.

It is estimated that the Dental Program receives 15-20 calls monthly from adults in dental pain without sufficient funds and no coverage for treatment.

## Dental Health Fair

*Submitted by Lainie Taylor, Dental Assistant*



Health Unit dental staff recently delivered a "Dental Health Fair" to students at Algonquin Public School, as part of our ongoing efforts to provide dental health education to students in the tri-county area.

Approximately 125 students in grades one through five participated in this "hands on" health fair by "rotating" through four "stations" set up in the gymnasium. The four stations included information on the following topics: Prevention, Plaque Control, Nutrition and Smoking/Oral Cancer and Tooth Safety.

Each student was given a "passport" which was stamped at each station. This passport contained information for students and parents. At the end of the session, which lasted approximately 40 minutes per class, students also received a "health unit bag" full of goodies such as a new toothbrush, pencil, and marker, as well as information on the topics covered at the health fair. Teachers also received resources for use in their classroom.

This health fair is always well received by both students and teachers, and the Dental Program plans to continue offering this educational day to other schools in our area in the future.

