



Health Matters

A newsletter from the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

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<http://www.healthunit.org>

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If you have any suggestions for Health Matters please email us at info@healthunit.org

Local Students Turn Off The Television

Imagine a one-week recess from watching television. The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit organized "TV TURN OFF WEEK" to increase the level of physical activity among elementary school students and their families.

According to a recent York University study, "couch potatoes" are costing the Canadian economy \$3.1 billion annually. About two-thirds of Canadians are not active enough to benefit their health. Inactivity increases the risk for a number of chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, colon and breast cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis. Children are watching more television, surfing the internet and playing more video games instead of engaging in more active pursuits. This behaviour leaves less time available for physical activity, which could lead to future health problems.

Lombardy Public School and Kemptville Public School competed with each other to abstain from watching television, playing video games and surfing the internet (with the exception of internet access for homework) from March 26 to April 2, 2001. Almost 800 staff and family members pledged they would find other ways to spend their free time, rather than sitting in front of a screen.

Students were given log sheets to record their activities as well as a list of "screen-free" ideas that they could do instead of watching TV. Families and schools came up with very creative ways to spend their time.

Eighty different "screen-free" activities were planned between each school.

Kemptville Public School had numerous events for "TV TURN OFF WEEK" including; skipping rope, a basketball game, a school dance, a play practice for the drama club, music classes, cookie exchanges and paintings of No TV slogans.

Lombardicise - a morning exercise program for the entire school, was just one of the many initiatives for the weeklong challenge that the students at Lombardy Public School put together. They also had a student-teacher basketball game, field trips to curling, swimming, bowling and skating facilities, a school-wide reading competition, a board games day, a bird-house building day and an invention convention.

The Health Unit awarded several prizes to all "TV TURN OFF WEEK" participants. The Tri-Health Coalition, Mount Pakenham, Canadian Tire and the Perth Public Pool graciously donated prizes. Rewards included board games, sporting goods, ski lift tickets and gift certificates. These gifts helped the students maintain screen-free activities for the week and hopefully will fight the trend of higher "screen time" and lower activity levels among young people.



Although some students had difficulty staying completely screen-free, they made a strong effort to decrease the hours spent in front of the television. Students found extra time to be physically active as well as socialize with family and friends. When asked about her experience during "TV TURN OFF WEEK" one student stated: "I enjoyed playing games with my family and I even got along better with my brother."

Congratulations to Lombardy and Kemptville Public Schools! Your creativity and enthusiasm provided inspiration for future "TV TURN OFF WEEK" challenges at other schools.

If your school would like to participate in "TV TURN OFF WEEK" 2002, please call Meagan Finucane, Public Health Nurse at 345-5685 ext. 2224 or call our Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 and ask for ext. 2224.

Submitted by Meagan Finucane