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Health Briefs

Information for a healthy workplace

Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

Fall 2005

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Nutritionist*

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Influenza & The Flu Vaccine

Submitted by Martina Flanagan, R.N., B.Sc.N., Public Health Nurse

What Is Influenza?

Influenza (the flu) is a serious illness. It is caused by influenza A and B viruses and occurs in Canada every year. Influenza causes fever, cough, headache, muscle soreness, sore throat and stuffy nose. Influenza can lead to pneumonia. It can also make other illnesses worse, especially chronic illnesses such as diseases of the lungs and heart.

Influenza spreads very easily from infected person to others through coughing and sneezing. It is also spread by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects like unwashed hands, clothes, toys, eating utensils, etc. after they have been contaminated by the flu virus.

What Is Flu Vaccine?

Influenza vaccine provides adults and children with active immunity against the influenza virus. It is not produced from human blood or blood products. The flu vaccine changes every year according to the strains of flu that are predominant.

The vaccine cannot give you the flu because it does not contain live virus.

How well does influenza vaccine protect against the flu?

- It protects about 70 percent of people who get a flu shot. You can still get the flu, but you will be less sick than if you were not vaccinated. In elderly people this vaccine can prevent pneumonia in about 6 out of 10 people and can prevent death in more than 8 out of 10 people.
- By protecting oneself with the flu shot, people are protecting others who may be more at risk from getting the flu - such as young babies, the elderly and people who are medically compromised.

Do Not Get The Flu Vaccine If You Have Any Of The Following:

- Severe allergy to eggs.
- Allergy to thimerosal (a preservative added to the influenza vaccine (0.01%) to keep the vaccine from spoiling).
- An active neurological disorder or a past history of Guillan-Barré Syndrome.

NOTE: Pregnancy and breastfeeding are not considered contraindications to vaccination.

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Will your 3-year-old be ready to start school in one year?

*Submitted by Rosemary Sheahan, R.N., B.N.Sc., Public Health Nurse,
Coordinator, Healthy Babies/Healthy Children program*

Many parents look at their 3-year-old child and say "I can't believe he/she will be starting school in a year". They wonder if their child will be able to adapt to the structure and routines of the classroom and being away from his parent(s) for the whole day.

Thinking about your preschooler's school readiness well before he/she is registered gives you a wonderful opportunity to look at his skills and development and then help him learn and practice skills that will help him when he starts school.

Questions to ask yourself are, can your 3-year-old:

- ▶ Get dressed with help?
- ▶ Go to the bathroom?
- ▶ Ask for help?
- ▶ Feel good about trying new things?
- ▶ Share & take turns with other children?
- ▶ Communicate so a teacher and other students can understand?
- ▶ Listen and follow directions?



The Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit has information and resources about child growth and development, school readiness and community resources. The Health Unit can provide you with a developmental checklist for your 3-year-old so that you can see if your child is able to do the activities that most children the same age are doing. We can also provide you with ideas how you can help your child develop the skills that will help him/her be school ready.

According to a report from Applied Research Branch, "Being school ready at school entry gives children the opportunity to benefit from all that school has to offer, both academically and socially. This allows them to develop self-respect and self-esteem as they tackle the challenges of learning and growing up."

If you would like to receive a developmental checklist or other information about school readiness, just call The Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or 345-5685 or go to our website at www.healthunit.org



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Dear Dora

Submitted by Erin McLean, R.N., B.N.Sc., Public Health Nurse

Dear Dora:

I heard on the radio that kids have to be in a booster seat until they weigh 80 lbs? What's up with this? I was so happy to be finished with car seats, but now I have to keep the kids in booster seats?

— *Confused in Carleton Place*

Dear Confused

You heard correctly, there is a new law in place as of September 1st 2005 in Ontario. All children must be properly restrained in the car. A child may legally use the seat belt when they reach 80 lbs or 4'9" tall, or 8 years of age. A child may safely use the seat belt when they reach 80-90 lbs and the shoulder belt rests on their shoulder, not across their face.

So why can't children just use the seat belt?

- **Children have less developed hip bones.** When adults use a seatbelt, their hip bones anchor the lap belt in place and prevent it from riding up over the abdomen. Children's hip bones don't provide the same anchor. In a crash, the seat belt easily slips past their hip bones to the abdomen, leading to serious soft tissue and organ damage. They can also experience serious fractures of the spine, paraplegia or be killed.
- **Children's legs are too short.** Their legs are not long enough for them to sit against the back of the seat and bend their knees comfortably over the edge of the vehicle seat. Therefore, they slouch. This causes the lap belt to ride up over the abdomen instead of across the hip bones.
- **Children are too small for the shoulder belt and they have narrow shoulders.** This causes the shoulder belt to ride up over the child's neck and face. Children will often put the shoulder belt under their arm or behind their back. In a crash or a sudden stop, children without the protection of the shoulder belt, will jack-knife forward, putting strong pressure on their abdomen. The sudden forward head and upper body movement may cause serious head, neck and spinal injuries.

A booster seat 'boosts' a child into the proper position for the seat belt to work properly. Children are more comfortable in a booster seat too.

Booster seats vary in cost and as of September 1st 2005, there will no longer be any provincial sales tax on booster seats. Read the labels and the instructions carefully to make sure it suits the needs of your child.

If you have questions on choosing and using booster seats, call the Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 or Transport Canada at 1-800-333-0371

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I Know Physical Activity is Good for My Health BUT...

Submitted by Danielle Shewfelt, R.N., B.N.Sc., Public Health Nurse

Most people are aware that physical activity is good for them, so why is it that more than half of us are not active enough to benefit our health? Many people complain of a number of barriers including not enough time, money, energy, motivation, fear of getting hurt, unsure how to start.

Breaking through the barriers and getting started!

- **Consult your health care provider** before beginning a new activity. Work with them to come up with a plan that is safe and effective for you.
- **Set goals** for how you want to improve your *health* instead of how you want your body to *look* e.g., "I want to be able to walk 30 minutes without stopping".
- **Make a clear plan** you can follow e.g., "Three days a week we will go for a family walk after dinner". This is easier to follow than a general plan like "I will exercise more".
- **Make physical activity a priority!** Book it in as you would an appointment. You deserve to take time for yourself!



- **Find something you enjoy doing and do it!** Teaching your children that physical activity can be fun can increase the chances that they will live an active life into adulthood and beyond.



- **Small changes** are easier to stick with, such as adding a 10-minute walk during your lunch hour and gradually increasing your walk each week.
- **Variety keeps it interesting!** Try new things like gardening, tennis and yoga.
- **Make your family time, active time.** Replace a family movie with a family swim, walk, bike or game of tag. There are plenty of ways to be active that are free!
- **Keep track** of your progress in a log book or on a calendar, this may motivate you to keep going. *To pick up a free Activity log visit one of the Leeds Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit offices.*
- **You may experience some discomfort** when beginning a new activity. This should pass over time as your body becomes stronger.
- **Listen to your body.** If you are experiencing pain STOP, and visit your health care provider.

How much activity should I do?

Health Canada recommends adults get 60 minutes of light activity every day OR 30-60 minutes of moderate activity 4 days a week.

For Health Canada's Guidelines to Physical Activity go to:
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/index.html>

To learn more about how to fuel your activity go to:
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/guide/index_e.html



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Pap Tests: A Way to Show You Care for Yourself

Submitted by Bonnie Schnittker R.N., P.H.N., Public Health Nurse

Take the time to care for yourself. **All women** who are, or have ever been, sexually active should be screened for cervical cancer. The screening method is a Pap test, which is done by your health care provider. Screening is done every 1 – 3 years depending on your previous Pap test results. The Pap test will look for abnormal cervical cells.

Risk factors that increase a woman's chance of developing abnormal cervical cells include:

- *Sexual activity anytime in their lifetime
- *Sexual activity before the age of 18
- More than 1 partner in their lifetime
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

(*Sexual activity includes vaginal intercourse, oral/vaginal sexual activity or digital/vaginal sexual activity)

HPV is a very common virus usually spread from one person to another through sexual contact. It is so common, that most women have likely been exposed to it at some time. There are many different types of HPV. A few types have been linked directly to cervical cancer. Most people who have HPV will not have any signs or symptoms. It will usually go away on its own. But while it is in the body it can cause cell changes on the cervix that may lead to cancer.

Other factors that may influence the development of cell changes on the cervix include:

- Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke
- Use of hormonal contraceptives
- > 5 full-term pregnancies
- Other sexually transmitted diseases
- Poor diet
- Weak immune system (your body's defenses)

Unlike other cancers, cancer of the cervix is usually preventable. Cervical cancer is almost 90% preventable. With regular Pap testing, abnormal cervical cells can be detected early (in the pre-cancerous stage) and treated properly.

If it has been a year or more since your last pap test, check with your health care provider about when you require your next pap test.

Regular Pap Tests Can Save Your Life!

For further information, contact the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853.

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The Ninth Day of the Ninth Month is International FASD Awareness Day

Submitted by Denise Kall, R.N., B.N., Public Health Nurse

Each year at 9:09 a.m. on the Ninth Day of the Ninth Month, communities around the world are asked to spend a moment of reflection. This is to remember that during the nine months of pregnancy, alcohol can be very dangerous to the baby. People everywhere are asked to remember the millions of people worldwide who will struggle with intellectual disabilities caused by exposure to alcohol before birth. The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Coalition of Leeds, Grenville & Lanark wants women of childbearing age and their families to understand that "Alcohol & Pregnancy Don't Mix."

It is important to help spread the word about the dangers of drinking alcohol while pregnant. In fact, it is safest to stop drinking alcohol before pregnancy. There is no known safe amount or time that alcohol can be consumed during pregnancy. One in 100 births are affected by prenatal exposure to alcohol.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause permanent brain damage and birth defects to a baby. Brain damage caused by drinking alcohol during pregnancy can result in learning disabilities, hyperactivity, difficulty paying attention, difficulty remembering, difficulty managing anger, poor judgment and difficulties with problem solving.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is the umbrella term used to describe the range of defects and disabilities that are caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong problem that the child will not outgrow. FASD occurs in all cultures and levels of society. Early diagnosis is important to help get resources in place to support FASD families.

Alcohol is a part of our Canadian lifestyle. There are many reasons why it may be used during pregnancy:

- Some women may drink before they know they are pregnant
- Some may not know it is harmful
- Some women drink alcohol because of life's problems
- Some may be pressured by family & friends
- Some drink alcohol because it is part of their social life

All women need the support of their partners, families, co-workers and communities to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. At 9:09 a.m. on the ninth day of the ninth month, everyone can pause to think about the importance of being alcohol-free during the nine months of pregnancy.

For more information on alcohol and pregnancy, contact the Health Unit's Health Action Line: 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.alcoholfreepregnancy.ca.



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Your kids are watching and listening - Role modelling for your child's health

Submitted by Meena Parameswaran, MAN, RD, Registered Dietitian/Public Health Nutritionist

As a parent or a caregiver, you know children copy what they see and hear. Whether it is acting like their favourite animal or repeating a song they have heard on the radio, kids are like sponges. This is how they learn. What you say and do has a big impact on shaping your child's health habits for life, especially when it comes to healthy eating, physical activity, and self-esteem.

Healthy Eating

Your child looks to you when forming attitudes about food when it comes to food preferences and food choices. You can influence your child's food choices by making healthy foods available. If you eat healthy foods, your child is more likely to eat these foods as well.

Easy ways to encourage healthy eating habits:

- Offer the same healthy foods to everyone in your family. Try new foods together.
- Listen to your children. They know when they are hungry and when they are full.
- Involve your child in grocery shopping and preparing meals. A child who helps with dinner is more likely to eat it.
- Look to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating for ideas and information.

Physical Activity

Active parents have active kids. Being physically active is an important part of healthy child development. Your child looks to you as an example. Being active can be fun and simple and can be something you and your child do every day.

Easy ways to help your child be more active:

- Walk your child to daycare or school.
- Take the stairs instead of elevators or escalators.
- Plan an active weekend. Go swimming or skating. Play soccer or play in the park.
- Discover free activity programs in your neighbourhood.
- Set limits on your child's screen time (TV, computer, video games).

Weight Issues

Children learn how they feel about themselves from their parents. Your child's perceptions are affected by the way you feel and talk about yourself and others. Positive body image is linked to good self-esteem, and these two qualities build a child's confidence.

Easy ways to boost your child's self-esteem:

- Do not criticize your own body, your child's body or the bodies of others.
- Teach your child that body images used by the media are not realistic. Healthy bodies come in many shapes and sizes.
- Praise your child's actions and abilities often.

Remember, your children are listening, watching and learning from you. Start small. Let your child pick out a vegetable or fruit to put into the grocery cart. Walk to the park or play active games in your yard. Remind your child that healthy bodies come in many shapes and sizes. Be a positive role model for your child.

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