

HEALTH UNIT OFFICES

Almonte
79 Spring Street
Unit #3,
Almonte, Ontario
K0A 1A0
(613) 256-1203

Brockville
458 Laurier Blvd.
Brockville, Ontario
K6V 7A3
(613) 345-5685

Kemptville
2685 Concession Rd.
Kemptville, Ontario
K0G 1J0
(613) 258-5941

Smiths Falls
52 Abbott Street N.
Unit 2
Smiths Falls, Ontario
K7A 1W3
(613) 283-2740

Gananoque
375 William St. S.
Suite 200
Gananoque, Ontario
K7G 1T2
(613) 382-4231

Health ACTION Line
1-800-660-5853

Website:
www.healthunit.org



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Health Briefs

Information for a healthy workplace

Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

Winter 2008

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Smart Living for the New Year!

Submitted by Ginny Ferguson, RN, BScN, PHN

You spoke and we listened! Four focus groups evaluated our Health Briefs workplace newsletter's name, format, style, content, and method of distribution. Several suggestions were made to improve, update, and enhance our Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit's workplace newsletter, such as:

- A new name: Smart Living
- A new look: crisp, clean, colourful, and easily readable
- A new format: concise articles linked to more detailed information and resources
- Improved content: timely topics, male and female health issues, balanced lifestyle, parenting, sandwich generation, current social issues at work, at home and at play
- Methods of distribution: hard copy, email, and / or web

So, coming in April 2009 you will receive our new workplace newsletter, *Smart Living*, and it will be Smart Living for you at your workplace, at home and at play.

Have a safe and happy holiday season and New Year!



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Have you heard about diabetes or prediabetes?

*Submitted by Tracey Fuller, RD, CDE & Donna Elliot, RN, CDE
Rideau Valley Diabetes Services*

Chances are you have heard of diabetes, but have you heard of prediabetes? Prediabetes is the first stage of high blood sugars and can often develop into type 2 diabetes over time. In 2003, 1.5 million people in Ontario (between 40 and 74 years old) had been told they have prediabetes. The good news is, with some changes to physical activity, eating habits and weight loss (if overweight), type 2 diabetes can be avoided. Diabetes is diagnosed when a fasting blood sugar is 7.0 mmol/L or higher.

Prediabetes and diabetes are serious conditions that can lead to long term health problems such as heart disease and stroke. And the numbers are on the rise. In Lanark, Leeds and Grenville alone, there are more than 10,000 people with diabetes over the age of 20, and many others with diabetes that don't even know it! So, what is the big deal about having diabetes or prediabetes? Let's start with an explanation of **what happens in the body** of someone with diabetes or prediabetes. When food is eaten, some of it is broken down into sugar (glucose) by our body. This is good—our bodies use this sugar for energy. When a person has diabetes or prediabetes, the body cannot get the sugar into his/her cells. As a result, the sugar stays in the bloodstream at a high level and can cause damage over the long term.

People should be aware of the risk factors for diabetes and the signs and symptoms of elevated blood sugars since 69% of Ontarians without diabetes have one of the major risk factors: overweight (BMI>27), physical inactivity and low income. Other risk factors include: having a family member with diabetes, being a member of a high risk group (Aboriginal, Hispanic, South Asian, Asian or African descent), giving birth to a baby that weighed over 4 kg (9 lbs) at birth, having had gestational diabetes, being told you have impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose, having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and having been diagnosed with any of the following conditions—Polycystic ovary syndrome, Acanthosis nigricans (darkened patches of skin) or Schizophrenia.

The good news is, people can have a positive impact in helping to prevent and control type 2 diabetes and prediabetes. A lifestyle of healthy food choices and regular physical activity play an important role in the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes and prediabetes.

Recognize the signs and symptoms of diabetes! These may include: unusual thirst, frequent urination, weight change, extreme fatigue or lack of energy, blurred vision, frequent or recurring infections, cuts and bruises that are slow to heal, tingling and numbness in the hands or feet and trouble getting and maintaining an erection. But important to note that many people diagnosed with diabetes have no symptoms at all!

Remember November is Diabetes Month ... have a look at the **Canadian Diabetes Association web site** www.diabetes.ca for more detailed information. For more information on resources in the Tri-county, please contact the **Rideau Valley Diabetes Services at 613-284-2558 or toll free: 1-877-321-4000**, or www.rvds.ca

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Stay Clear of Listeriosis

Submitted by Carole Chang, Registered Dietitian, Public Health Nutritionist

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria* bacteria. Foods such as unpasteurized (raw) dairy products, raw vegetables and uncooked meats can become contaminated with the bacteria. Foods such as hot dogs, cold cuts or deli meats can also be contaminated after processing. Foods that are contaminated with *Listeria* may look, smell and taste normal. However, *Listeria* can be killed by proper cooking methods.

Who is at risk?

Any person who contracts the listeria bacteria can become sick. However, the elderly, people with weakened immune systems and pregnant women are at higher risk than other healthy adults who come into contact with *Listeria*. Listeriosis in pregnant women may cause miscarriage, premature delivery, still birth and infection of the newborn.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

Symptoms may start suddenly and include: vomiting, nausea, cramps, diarrhea, severe headache, constipation or fever. Some infections become severe and develop into an infection of the brain or the lining of the brain and blood poisoning. Some people experience only mild flu-like symptoms. Symptoms usually appear within 2 to 30 days but can take up to 90 days after eating contaminated food.

How to avoid listeriosis:

- Cook all meat, fish and poultry very well, to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F). Check temperature with meat thermometer.
- Reheat leftovers and precooked ready-to-eat foods to at least 74°C (165°F).
- Store perishable foods, such as raw meats and fresh fruits and vegetables, in the refrigerator.
- Wash fruits and vegetables very well even if the packaging states that they have been pre-washed.
- Packaged, refrigerated foods should be used by the "best before", "use by" or "expires by" date.
- Refrigeration does not stop the growth of the bacteria on contaminated foods.
- Wash, rinse and sanitize all utensils, cutting boards and work surfaces before and after using them.
- Use separate utensils for preparing raw and cooked foods.
- Wash your hands, before, during and after food handling or before you eat.

Listeria bacteria are not commonly passed from person to person. Remember to wash your hands often especially when handling food. Contact your health care provider if you have symptoms.

For more information on listeriosis and how to prevent it, please contact the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit's Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 (or 613-345-5685) or visit our website at www.healthunit.org

References:

Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Diseases: *Listeria*. <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/disease/listeria.html> (October 2008).



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Avoiding Travelers' Diarrhea

Submitted by Andrew Dunn, Public Health Inspector BSc, BAA, C.P.H.I. (C) and Sarah Craig, Student Public Health Inspector

Every year, thousands of Canadians flock to warmer climates during the winter months seeking sunshine and relaxation. Unfortunately travelers often forget that many tropical and sub-tropical developing countries, which are very popular tourist destinations, do not always enjoy the same sanitation standards as Canada and other developed nations. While the majority return home healthy, it is estimated that 25% to 40% (*Public Health Agency of Canada 2001*) of travelers acquire infections, which result in gastrointestinal illness (mainly nausea, vomiting and diarrhea) which is often simply called "travelers' diarrhea". These infections are usually picked up from eating food or beverages contaminated with a variety of germs, mainly bacteria, viruses and parasites.

While relatively common amongst tropical vacationers, travelers' diarrhea is avoidable. The use of good personal hygiene practices and following some simple rules regarding food and water consumption can significantly reduce the risk of illness.

The following key principles are recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada in order to lower the risk of food or water-borne illness while travelling to developing countries (*Public Health Agency of Canada 2007*):

- Eat only food that has been well cooked and is still hot when served.
- Drink only purified water that has been boiled or disinfected with chlorine or iodine, or commercially bottled water in sealed containers.
- Avoid ice, unless it has been made with purified water.
- Drinking carbonated drinks (without ice) including beer is generally safe.
- Avoid unpasteurized dairy products and ice cream.
- Avoid uncooked foods – especially seafood – and salads. Fruit and vegetables that can be peeled by the eater are usually safe.
- Avoid food from street vendors.

The basic rule is: boil it, cook it, peel it or leave it!

Finally, **wash your hands before you eat and after going to the washroom.** If a safe supply of water is not available, take along a bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Remember that when eating food with your fingers, you are also eating any germs that might be on your hands!

Above all, enjoy your vacation. Following the above simple advice should help ensure you return home with nothing more than happy memories!

References:

Public Health Agency of Canada. "Risk of Enteric Illness Associated with Travel." CCDR, March 15, 2001.
Travel Health Advisory. March 13, 2007. www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/tmp-pmv/travel/gastro-eng.php (September 15, 2008).



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Travel Immunization

Submitted by Violet Capper, RN, BScN, Public Health Nurse

Taking a vacation? Protect your health.

Check your immunization status with your doctor or the Health Unit. **Do this at least six (6) to eight (8) weeks before your trip.** This will allow the vaccines enough time to take effect.

What immunization you require will depend on your age, health, any pre-existing medical conditions, previous immunizations, the type of vacation you are taking and your accommodation arrangements.

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark Health Unit Immunization Clinic or your own doctor can provide you with a consultation or any vaccine for the following diseases:

Diphtheria	Poliomyelitis
Hepatitis A	Rubella
Hepatitis B	Tetanus
Measles	Typhoid
Meningococcal Meningitis	

For **Malaria**, the doctor will have to prescribe the medication.

**Kingston or Ottawa
Travel Clinics will
supply any other more
specialized vaccines.**



Be prepared and have a stress-free vacation.