

E-bulletin: Public Health North East

Welcome to issue number 57 of the e-bulletin produced by Public Health North East. It is published on the second Friday of each month and aims to include information from all around the region. We hope you find it interesting and will continue to support it by supplying news from your patch.

Dr Stephen Singleton, Regional Director of Public Health

This bulletin is designed to keep you updated on the latest developments in public health in the North East. Each article provides a web link or contact details for more information. Please send details about any forthcoming public health-related events in the region to simon.p.mills@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Smooth introduction of smoking law

The introduction of smoke-free workplaces and public places went smoothly, according to the Department of Health.

People are particularly enjoying the benefits of cleaner air in pubs and clubs - and not smelling of cigarettes after a night out.

A report on the first three months of the new legislation found high levels of support from both the general public and businesses in the North East.

Just over two thirds of adults back the law and 72 per cent believe it will have a positive effect on public health. Nationally, a greater proportion of smokers (47%) support the new law than oppose it (37%).

More than 18,000 North East businesses were inspected between July 1 and the end of September. Of these, 99 per cent were compliant and 92 per cent displayed the correct signage.

Ailsa Rutter, Director of Fresh – Smoke Free North East, said: “The legislation was a huge milestone in the long journey to reduce the harm caused by smoking.

“The benefits of going smoke-free are significant to the health of the region and the support for the law continues to get stronger.

“The statistics from the North East certainly prove it is having a positive impact on our region, with the majority of people supporting the legislation and almost 100 per cent of businesses showing full compliance.

“Yet smoking remains the greatest cause of premature death in our region, killing around 5,800 adults every year.

“Although the success of the legislation to date is evident, there is still a considerable amount of work that needs to be done.

“Fresh will be continuing its wide range of work with our many partners to maintain smoke-free compliance, encourage more people to quit and raise political and public awareness of the need for further action on this vital health issue.”

Nationally, only 70 fixed penalty notices have been issued to individuals and the number of calls to the smoke-free compliance line has plummeted. This suggests that, as in Scotland and Ireland, the ban has been largely self-enforced.

More from sallyp@robson-brown.co.uk

Healthworks opens for business

A pioneering new healthy living centre facility in Easington Colliery officially opened its doors for business this week.

MP John Cummings, four children from local schools and Easington-born Newcastle United goalkeeper Steve Harper were the focus of attention at Healthworks.

More than £750,000 was spent on modernising and refurbishing the former waterworks building in Paradise Lane.

Facilities include:

- weight management programmes
- men's health service
- food co-op
- healthy eating courses
- citizens and benefit advice

The new modern community facility will be run and managed by County Durham Primary Care Trust.

It was developed as part of the neighbourhood renewal programme in partnership with Easington Council, Northumbrian Water and others.

Lady Ann Calman, Chair of County Durham PCT, said: 'Healthworks is a ground-breaking initiative which will make a real difference towards improving the health of the people of Easington District.

"The centre will provide services and a focal point for the local community where everyone can benefit.

"In Easington District, as in other areas of the country, there are concerns about the rising trend of obesity and other health issues in children and young people.

"The new healthy living centre will give a range of organisations and community groups the opportunity to focus on issues which affect the quality of life - and hopefully we will see people living healthier lifestyles in the future."

More from Pat Lawlor on 0191 333 3003

Funding to tackle child obesity

Two Teesside primary care trusts have secured funding from the Big Lottery to tackle child obesity.

Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough PCTs will target overweight and obese children aged between 7 and 13 over the next two years by implementing a series of MEND interventions.

MEND is a community, family-based programme designed to deliver sustained improvements in families' diets, fitness levels and overall health.

It is being delivered in partnership with the two PCTs, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council and Tees Valley Leisure.

There is no charge for the families but a parent/guardian must attend each session.

More from phil.sandford@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk

Latest infection figures published

Figures for cases of MRSA and clostridium difficile infections in the North East were published by the Health Protection Agency last week.

In the three months from April to June 2007 there were 90 MRSA bloodstream infections reported in the North East compared to 88 in the previous quarter, a small increase of two.

Over the same period there were 926 reports of Clostridium difficile infection in patients aged 65 and over in the region compared to 1,013 in the previous quarter, a reduction of 9%

In addition to the latest quarterly data, the HPA also published its annual report on healthcare associated infection for 2006/7.

It shows there were 369 MRSA bloodstream infections in the North East compared to 378 in the previous year, a reduction of 2%.

The annual data for clostridium difficile shows that infections in the region increased from 2800 cases in 2005/6 to 2965 in 2006/7, a rise of 6%.

Dr John Woodhouse, regional director of the HPA in the North East said: "Healthcare associated infection is a constantly moving target which demands complex and evolving prevention and control strategies.

"Having the right surveillance systems to track these infections is fundamental and underpins the action plans necessary to prevent and reduce levels of infection and the development of antimicrobial resistance.

"There is a great deal of excellent work being carried out by NHS staff locally and nationally and we will continue to support them in their efforts to tackle this challenging problem."

More from karen.lloyd@hpa.org.uk

Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin...

Enthusiastic patients in Middlesbrough are enjoying a new exercise regime - without even leaving their seats.

The recently-launched chair-based exercise classes are gathering momentum as more and more eligible patients take a seat and join in the weekly healthy fun at Pennyman House and Victoria Apartments.

Guided by a team based at West Acklam Clinic, the sessions not only give the patients a gentle physical workout, they also encourage social interaction.

The service is offered to residents with long-term medical conditions who are regularly seen by a social worker, community matron or a community nurse. The sessions are held within Pennyman House in North Ormesby and Victoria Apartments near Albert Park in the town.

The exercises improve muscle strength, coordination, balance, upper body strength which in turn improves the patients' confidence and independence, increases their motivation and social interaction and aims to reduce the number of falls.

Wendy Larry, a healthcare assistant working with the community matrons, is the driving force behind the project.

She said: "This is a great opportunity to bring services together as health and social care teams continue to work more closely together.

"Lots of our patients live alone and this certainly helps to reduce their feeling of isolation.

“The groups keep growing week by week and I’m particularly pleased that they are so diverse. They are all very enthusiastic and that makes the sessions so enjoyable.”

More from Wendy Larry on 01642 813568

North East lowest for TB cases

The North East continues to have the lowest incidence of tuberculosis in England, according to the latest annual figures published by the Health Protection Agency this week.

In 2006 there were 8113 new cases of TB reported in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which equates to a rate of 14.6 cases per 100,000 people.

Of these, 144 were reported in the North East which equates to a local rate of 5.6 cases per 100,000.

Despite this low incidence, there was a small increase (10) in the number of cases diagnosed in the North East in 2006 compared with the previous year.

Dr Meng Khaw, TB lead for the HPA in the North East, said: “Although rates of new diagnoses of TB in the North East are less than half the national average this does not mean we can afford to be complacent about this disease.

“The earlier a case is diagnosed the easier it is to treat and the less likely it is to spread.

“For this reason it’s important that people who are at risk are aware of the signs and symptoms of the infection so that they can seek prompt medical advice.”

More from karen.lloyd@hpa.org.uk