

## **E-bulletin: Public Health North East**

Welcome to issue number 58 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 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](mailto:simon.p.mills@dh.gsi.gov.uk)*

### **HIV cases on the up**

The number of people being treated for HIV in the North East increased by 15 per cent in 2006 according to the Health Protection Agency.

Despite this the region continues to have the lowest number of people being treated for HIV in England.

*Testing Times*, the Agency's annual report on sexually transmitted infections in the UK, reveals there were 868 people living in the North East receiving HIV-related healthcare in 2006 – compared to 754 the previous year.

Regional figures for other sexually transmitted infections show increases in four of the most common – chlamydia, syphilis, herpes and genital warts. There was a reduction in the number of gonorrhoea cases.

Dr John Woodhouse, regional director of the HPA in the North East, said: "This report gives the HPA and our partners in the NHS and other organisations a clear picture of sexual health so we can review progress in reducing the spread of HIV and other STIs.

"We know from our surveillance that there are some groups in the community who are more at risk and it is important that we continue to discuss these figures so we can see where to target information and interventions.

"We also know that up to a third of all HIV positive people are unaware of their infection and will be unknowingly transmitting it to their sexual partners if they do not use condoms.

"The sooner HIV and other STIs are diagnosed and treated, the less likely it is they will be passed on and the better the treatment outcome.

"So it's important that testing, diagnoses and treatment opportunities continue to be improved and increased.

"However, as always, the most important message is that the best way to protect yourself from contracting any STI is by practising safe sex and using condoms with all new and casual partners."

More from [karen.lloyd@hpa.org.uk](mailto:karen.lloyd@hpa.org.uk)

## **Dying to keep warm**

Profiles outlining the scale of excess winter mortality in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees have just been published.

They show that in the winter of 2005/06 an additional 10 people per week died in the four local authorities combined when compared with other times of year. The Excess Winter Deaths Index for Teesside was 9.3, ranging from 2.4 in Hartlepool to 13.4 in Middlesbrough.

Nationally the index was 15.8 and for the North East it was 12.6. Each of the profiles also shows variation in fuel poverty and details of energy efficiency investment and improvement.

Leon Green, public health intelligence specialist, said: "It is encouraging that these latest figures show Teesside to have lower excess winter mortality than the national average.

"However, it is important that in addition to current good practice, further efforts are made to reduce seasonal variations."

*Cold Kills updates for 2007 are available at [www.teespublichealth.nhs.uk](http://www.teespublichealth.nhs.uk)*

## **Drug misuse service praised**

Teesside has a high quality drug misuse service with 82% of clients in treatment for six months or more, according to a local review.

That is 22% higher than the national average, reflecting excellent engagement between clients and service providers locally.

Teesside has high levels of drug users in treatment and a history of agencies working successfully in partnership.

Drug-related deaths are no higher than in areas of similar levels of deprivation/drug misuse and most are individuals who are not receiving treatment.

The NHS, police, prison service, probation service and local authorities are working together to reduce the number.

Professor Peter Kelly, executive director for public health on Teesside, said: "Every drug-related death is a tragedy for all involved.

"This work highlights the risks associated with substance abuse and makes recommendations to improve the already very good local services further.

"Above all, I hope we can learn from this work to reduce the number of tragically early deaths due to drug abuse in our community."

Dr Helen Park, a specialist registrar in public health based on Teesside, carried out the review.

She added: "It is good to see that local services for those who misuse drugs are of very high quality.

"Through them we hope to further reduce the damaging effects of drug misuse not only on individuals and their families but also on our communities.

"It is important that people who misuse drug understand the potentially fatal consequences of combining drugs and alcohol, even in very small quantities, and also see the benefit of accessing the excellent services available."

*More from [phil.sandford@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk](mailto:phil.sandford@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk)*

## **Counterfeit and smuggled tobacco summit**

The North East played host to a summit on counterfeit and smuggled tobacco attended by experts from across the country last week.

A new generation of young people are being hooked on smoking thanks to the availability of cheap counterfeit and smuggled tobacco, according to Fresh, Smoke Free North East.

Up to one in five cigarettes and half of loose tobacco in the North is sold at knockdown prices, making it more attractive and affordable for the region's youngsters.

Most people who start smoking become hooked before the age of 18 and cheap cigarettes at £3 a packet from illicit sellers ensure more people experiment with tobacco. One out of two smokers will die from their addiction.

"Cheap illegal tobacco is a real problem in the region," says Ailsa Rutter, Director of Fresh, Smoke Free North East.

"And what's worse is that these products are readily available in our most deprived communities where there are already high rates of lung cancer and heart disease."

The event was organised by Fresh along with colleagues from Yorkshire and Humber and the North West.

Head of Detection for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in the North of England, John Kinghorn was one of the main speakers.

He said: "The North of England is one of the worst areas in the UK for the illegal importation and sale of cigarettes and hand-rolling tobacco.

"People sometimes assume that tobacco smuggling is a fairly low level crime and often the public turn a blind eye to it but what they don't realise is that it means big business for criminals and their gangs.

"This is far more than passengers simply bringing back a few extra cigarettes or a little more tobacco.

"Many smokers think they are getting a good deal but these cigarettes are usually cheap because they are not the genuine article.

"Counterfeit cigarettes are even worse for your health than normal cigarettes - and it is not easy to tell the difference between a genuine cigarette and a counterfeit one until it is too late."

*More from [AilsaRutter@chester-le-street.gov.uk](mailto:AilsaRutter@chester-le-street.gov.uk)*

## **Skilled for Health pilots**

Three pilot sites in the North East are taking part in the second phase of the Skilled for Health initiative with support from Public Health North East.

The national programme aims to address the low skills and health inequalities prevalent within traditionally disadvantaged communities.

It is a partnership between the Department of Health, the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills and the charity ContinYou.

Individuals and communities with low skills are often those who suffer the most social inequalities.

They often have the greatest difficulties in managing their own health as well as accessing health services for themselves and their families.

This is in addition to the major challenges they face in accessing employment opportunities and being able to manage many aspects of daily life.

Sites in Northumberland, County Durham and Gateshead are testing the learning materials developed in phase 1 of the programme over a two-year period.

The Northumberland project, led by Northumberland Care Trust, will focus on parents with limited literacy, language and numeracy skills.

In County Durham primary care trusts and partners will work in a range of settings, including with prisoners and their families and adults in rural areas with restricted access to services.

Staff at Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust will be working in partnership with the local PCT, council and education providers.

They will be building on the Trust's current work in supporting the development of a healthy workplace through its Improving Working Lives programmes and in offering literacy, language and numeracy training.

The Trust's national site role means that it will also act as a point of contact for others interested in introducing a Skilled for Health intervention with their workforce.

More from [denise.orange@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:denise.orange@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Moving Upstream to star award**

A trail-blazing project which is fuelling improvements in mental health across North Tyneside has received a national award.

The Moving Upstream scheme received recognition from the charity Shaw Trust with a national partner organisation star award.

It was presented by multi-millionaire entrepreneur and Dragon's Den panellist Duncan Bannatyne at a ceremony in London.

Shaw Trust provides training and work opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the workplace because of disability, ill health or social circumstances.

North Shields GP Dr Dave Tomson, who launched the innovative Moving Upstream project five years ago, was delighted about the recognition.

He said: "I am also pleased that the resulting publicity will give us the opportunity to spread the word about Moving Upstream both locally and nationally."

The project works by creating close relationships between health providers and voluntary sector agencies to address some of the reasons for mental ill health, such as housing problems, low self esteem and unemployment.

"It's an amazing project, which ensures doctors and nurses have instant access to voluntary agencies with the power to support their patients in all sorts of ways," said Shaw Trust employment consultant Cheryl Morgan, whose charity is one of over 20 Moving Upstream partner organisations.

"Dr Tomson and his team are innovative and tireless champions of early intervention and support and the project is a worthy winner of our Star Award."

More from [sam.start@northoftyne.nhs.uk](mailto:sam.start@northoftyne.nhs.uk)