

E-bulletin: Public Health North East

Welcome to issue number 59 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

Scrub up and spread the word - not the infection

Over £5 million is being invested in the region to ensure that NHS services meet the highest standards of cleanliness.

As part of this, NHS North East is leading a campaign to raise awareness of the role everyone can play in reducing the risk of infection.

The eye-catching campaign - which features regional NHS staff - will launch on January 21.

Supported by hospitals and primary care trusts, it will be seen both outside and inside healthcare facilities across the region.

Media ranging from bus sides, posters, leaflets and toilet mirror stickers to TV and radio will carry the message.

The campaign urges everyone to 'Scrub up and spread the word, not the infection'.

It will be rolled out to GP surgeries, hospitals and health centres with the aim of reaching as many people as possible to:

- remind all staff of the role they play in reducing infection
- remind visitors of the need to clean their hands before and after visiting
- increase public confidence in the cleanliness of the NHS across the region

NHS North East is urging all organisations to support the 'scrub up' campaign.

More from ayeeshah.tahir@northeast.nhs.uk

On the Rocks

Next steps in the regional approach to excessive drinking will be discussed at an event to be held later this year.

On the Rocks – Tackling Alcohol Misuse in the North East will take place at Hardwick Hall, County Durham, on March 13.

It is being organised by Public Health North East and the Community Safety team at Government Office for the North East.

The conference follows the publication of '*Safe Sensible Social: next steps in the national alcohol strategy*'.

It will provide the opportunity for partners from across the region to share their experiences in tackling alcohol misuse and to hear high-profile speakers from across the country.

Further information such as timings and a full agenda will be sent to interested parties nearer the time.

More from margaret.kynoch-macdonald@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Winter vomiting advice

As reports of 'winter vomiting' start to increase the Health Protection Agency is urging sufferers to stay away from work or school until they have been symptom-free for 48 hours to help to limit the spread of the illness.

It is also important that people who have had the bug do not visit relatives in hospital until they have been better for two days.

Most bouts of winter vomiting are caused by norovirus infection which is the most frequent cause of infectious gastroenteritis and affects approximately one million people in the UK every year.

Noroviruses cause an unpleasant but generally short-lived illness from which people will usually recover without treatment.

The main symptom is vomiting, which can come on very suddenly, and is sometimes accompanied by diarrhoea.

Dr Kirsty Foster, from the Health Protection Agency in the North East, said: "There's a lot of norovirus infection about at the moment and people will feel very unwell while they have it, but it is not usually necessary to seek medical advice unless the symptoms persist for more than a few days.

"In that case they should contact their family doctor by phone or take advice from NHS Direct."

Dr Foster said that in addition to staying away from work or school, people with norovirus should avoid visiting friends or relatives in hospitals, care homes or other institutions until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours.

She added: "Gastric illness caused by norovirus is highly infectious and it can spread rapidly in closed communities such as hospitals, care homes, sheltered housing accommodation and schools.

"The key to infection control is effective hand-washing with hot water and soap at appropriate times and this is particularly important after toilet visits."

More from karen.lloyd@hpa.org.uk

Implementing national TB plan

A half-day interactive workshop about implementing the national tuberculosis plan will be held in the North East next month.

Last year the Department of Health published a guide to planning and commissioning TB services.

DH representatives will attend the regional event at Government Office for the North East on February 19 to help primary care trusts use the guide.

PCTs are asked to field a team including the commissioner with responsibility for TB, the local lead clinician and lead nurse as well as their lead on the disease.

More from angela.king@dh.gsi.gov.uk

New food co-op launched

People in North Tyneside can eat more healthily thanks to a food co-op which is offering fresh fruit and vegetables.

Shiremoor Resource Centre hosts the weekly event which is held on a Wednesday and will run for the rest of this year.

North Tyneside Primary Care Trust Working set up the food co-op in conjunction with the charity The Good Life.

The aim is to offer local people the chance to eat a more balanced diet and improve their health.

Wendy Burke, North Tyneside's public health specialist, said: "Obesity is now one of the major public health issues.

"If you are obese you have an increased risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

"Many people now have inactive desk-based jobs and eat diets that are high in fat and sugar.

"To have good health and achieve a healthy weight you need to be physically active and eat a balanced diet including five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

"Setting up a food co-op is a great way of offering people the chance to eat more fruit and vegetables which will improve their health.

"Nearly 58% of men and 49% of women who took part in a recent North Tyneside survey are either overweight or obese.

"By swapping foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt and opting for more fresh vegetables and fruit you can lose weight and improve your health.

"If you are overweight or obese losing even a small amount of weight can make a difference."

More from sam.start@northoftyne.nhs.uk

Access to quit services 'not equitable'

Access to stop smoking services is not equitable for three out of the four primary care trust populations in the Tees area.

That is the main conclusion from a recently published review of services by Michael Fleming, public health intelligence specialist.

Access to the services corresponded most with need - based on smoking prevalence - only in Hartlepool.

Although rates of access to services were generally higher in the more deprived than affluent areas, the difference in uptake was not sufficiently great to match the corresponding differences in smoking.

Moreover, for all of the Tees communities - including Hartlepool - there was clear evidence of an 'inverse quit' phenomenon.

Michael Fleming explained: "The inverse quit phenomenon occurs when the successful quit rates are highest in the most affluent areas where the smoking rates are already lowest."

This evidence is now being considered by the stop smoking services to influence future plans.

More at www.teespublichealth.nhs.uk

MEND programme off to a flyer

The initial Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It! programme on Teesside aimed at reducing the number of overweight and obese children aged between 7 and 13 was a big success.

The results and feedback from both parents and children was positive. All the youngsters who took part lost weight - over a stone in one case.

They also reduced their body mass index and waist circumference measurements, while self esteem scores and fitness rates increased.

All the participants are now more active than they were prior to attending and parents have reported positive changes with their children's eating habits.

Parents have been supportive and have reported positive changes in the eating and physical activity habits of whole families.

The ten-week course was held in Eston Sports Academy and a further ten-week programme at Saltburn Leisure Centre began this week.

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

The MEND programme is suitable for children who are overweight or obese, although there are some exclusion criteria.

It is being delivered in partnership with Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough Primary Care Trusts, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council and Tees Valley Leisure.

More from phil.sandford@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk

Skins star backs chlamydia campaign

A North East regional radio campaign featuring Skins star Joe Dempsie ran over the Christmas and New Year period to help raise awareness of chlamydia.

The commercials - on Galaxy 105.6 - include information on how to get screened for the condition, the most common sexually transmitted infection which is increasing in the under 25s.

Joe, who plays Chris in the popular Channel 4 series which follows the lives of a group of Bristol teenagers, does the voiceover for the adverts.

He said: "Like a lot of people, I didn't realise how bad chlamydia can be. I wasn't aware that it could leave you infertile or that it affects lads as much as lasses.

"It's worrying when you hear that there often aren't any symptoms with it either but it can be easily detected by a simple urine test.

"I'm backing this campaign as I think it's really important that young people are aware of chlamydia and know that it can be sorted with a short course of antibiotics.

"I would encourage anyone to take this test and get sorted. You can also avoid getting chlamydia and unwanted pregnancies by always using a condom when you have sex."

More at www.checkyourbits.org

Public health network conference

The North East Teaching Public Health Network is holding its inaugural conference later this month.

Helping Bridge the Health Inequalities Gap will take place at the Sunderland Marriott Hotel on January 30.

Conference speakers include Professor Mala Rao, head of public health workforce and capacity at the Department of Health, and regional director of public health Dr Stephen Singleton.

More from jean.craister@sunderland.ac.uk

Award entries flooding in

Entries for the national Health and Social Care Awards are coming in from across the North East with more than 40 registered already.

Health and social services staff are being encouraged to put their work forward for regional and national recognition.

Teams or individuals who have been particularly innovative, or who have gone the extra mile for patients, can apply to have their work recognised and applauded by other staff, patients and experts.

Regional winners will receive their prize at a glittering awards ceremony in April and will be put forward to the national final, which will take place in July as part of the NHS 60th anniversary celebrations.

The closing date for applications is Friday 8 February 2008. Any NHS or social care team that wants to apply for an award should visit www.healthandsocialcareawards.org for further information.

One of last year's winners was Bev Atkinson from Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust.

She said: "The awards are a great opportunity for staff to receive recognition for all their good work to deliver real improvements for patients, families and carers.

"Our team was thrilled to win their category, which helped to raise the profile of their work.

"We look forward to entering this year's awards and to finding out about other excellent initiatives in the North East."

More from angela.clark@northeast.nhs.uk