

## E-bulletin: Public Health North East

Welcome to issue number 60 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](mailto:simon.p.mills@dh.gsi.gov.uk)*

### **Bid to transform health launched**

Ambitious plans to transform the health of the North East were formally launched by minister for the region Nick Brown last week.

The area's first ever health and well-being strategy aims to make people living here the healthiest in the country within a generation.

Mr Brown unveiled *Better Health, Fairer Health* to an invited audience in Newcastle which included Hugh Taylor, permanent secretary at the Department of Health.

The strategy is being led by regional director of public health Dr Stephen Singleton and has been developed following a three-month consultation.

He said: "We received responses from all quarters about whether we should have an ambitious strategy - and they were overwhelmingly positive.

"We are still at an early stage and this is a first edition. It is by no means an end product.

"I have a vision which informs all the actions proposed: The North East will have the best and fairest health and well-being and will be recognised for its outstanding and sustainable quality of life."

Ten key themes have been identified for the 25-year plan:

- economy, culture and environment
- mental health, happiness and well-being
- tobacco
- obesity, diet and physical activity
- alcohol
- prevention, fair and early treatment
- early life
- mature and working life
- later life
- a good death

Specific actions include setting up a regional office for the safe consumption of alcohol based on the highly successful Fresh – Smoke Free North East model.

The strategy also calls for people to have 'a good death' - free of pain, with family and friends nearby, dignified and in a place of one's choosing.

As part of this there will be an agreement between health and social care providers specifying the level of public sector funding that should be regarded as appropriate in support of terminal care services.

Regional advisory groups will be created from across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to take work forward in all ten areas.

They will be supported by the establishment of a regional public health centre of research excellence, which was announced last week.

The £5 million development is one of five nationally – and the only one based on a substantial regional collaboration.

A regional infrastructure for social marketing in health and health services is being established and this will also support the work that needs to be done.

Mr Brown said: “The health of people living in the North East has been too poor for too long.

“We are consistently top of the health league for all the wrong reasons, partly as a legacy of heavy industry and partly because of our lifestyles.

“It is to the credit of Dr Singleton and his colleagues that they have taken an unrelentingly optimistic approach to what can be achieved – and I look forward to the day when the North East is the healthiest region in the country.”

*More from [simon.p.mills@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:simon.p.mills@dh.gsi.gov.uk)*

## **MRSA cases going down**

The Health Protection Agency has just published the latest quarterly data for cases of MRSA and clostridium difficile.

In the three months from July to September 2007 there were 78 MRSA bloodstream infections reported in the North East compared to 90 in the previous quarter, a reduction of 13 per cent.

In the same period there were 145 reports of clostridium difficile infection in patients aged between 2 and 64 years and 628 reports in patients aged 65 or over.

But the method of collecting the clostridium difficile data was different to the method used previously and is therefore not statistically comparable.

Dr John Woodhouse, regional director of the HPA in the North East, said: “The continued downward trend in MRSA bloodstream infections is very welcome news and a major achievement by healthcare staff across the region.

“The changes being made by the Department of Health to the way NHS trusts collect their clostridium difficile figures are also welcomed as they should make the future information more robust.

“However, these changes aren’t yet reflected in the data published today which is why it has to be interpreted with caution.”

North East Strategic Health Authority said the region was performing relatively well in reducing MRSA infections compared to other areas of the country.

A spokeswoman added: “Rates of clostridium difficile across the North East have also continued to fall and the majority of trusts are performing well against agreed targets.

“However, we recognise that there is no room for complacency and prevention of infection remains one of the highest priorities for local health services.”

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

## **Managing TB in vulnerable groups**

A half-day workshop about the healthcare challenges of managing tuberculosis in vulnerable groups is taking place later this month.

It will be held at the Government Office for the North East on the morning of February 19.

Later that day at the same venue a Department of Health workshop about implementing the national TB plan will be held.

For more information about the earlier workshop or to register please contact - by February 8 - [carol.hollis@ntwha.nhs.uk](mailto:carol.hollis@ntwha.nhs.uk).

## **Smoking rates hit record low**

Smoking rates among adults in the North East have hit a record low of 25 per cent, according to new Government data.

The latest figures - taken from the General Household Survey 2006 - show prevalence dropping throughout the country.

Rates of smoking in the North East have fallen by four per cent from 29 per cent in 2005 to 25 per cent the following year - double the national average decline.

The statistics show a reduction of five per cent in the rates amongst women in the region, falling from 30 per cent to 25 per cent.

A decline among men in was also noted, falling by three per cent from 28 per cent to 25 per cent.

Ailsa Rutter, director of Fresh, Smokefree North East, said: "The new figures are very encouraging.

"The four per cent decline shows that our comprehensive and committed strategy has made a valuable contribution to changing the attitudes of the people in the region towards smoking.

"However, we cannot become complacent. We aim to build upon our recent successes - and we want to help the remaining 25 per cent of smokers realise the huge benefits of becoming smokefree.

"California currently has an impressive rate of 13 per cent and that's what we are aiming for.

"The North East's NHS Stop Smoking Services are some of the best in the country and smokers are four times more likely to quit with their help.

"As smoking continues to be the number one cause of premature death and disease in the region we aim to maintain our efforts in order to drive smoking rates down further.

"Hopefully we will be celebrating a larger decline when next year's figures are released."

*More at [www.freshne.com](http://www.freshne.com)*

## **Mosque health check-ups**

After being called to prayer, Muslims who attend mosques in Middlesbrough are being called to have a health check-up before they leave.

A series of awareness-raising events organised by the Primary Care Trust and Middlesbrough Council are to take place in the town's mosques during 2008.

A team made up of a diabetes nurse, a heart disease nurse and men's health advisors will be offering tips on how to keep healthy.

They are also hoping to offer testing for diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol levels. In addition, specialist diabetes advice will be available. Diabetes and heart disease are particularly prevalent among the South Asian community and the team is hoping to increase the awareness of ways in which people can prevent their development.

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

### **New programmes to tackle obesity**

Roots and Shoots is one of a number of new programmes being developed by Northumberland Care Trust to help support local children and families tackle obesity.

With the help of staff at The Alnwick Garden, the school children from throughout the county are able to grow, harvest and taste their own fruit and vegetables.

Pupils and teachers receive continued support to develop growing projects back at school.

Key messages about healthy eating, how to cook healthy food and enjoy physical activity through gardening will be fully explored.

A number of schools have been selected to take part this year with more schools able to access the programme next year.

The Get Active Northumberland Programme is another which is due to be piloted in the Ashington and Hexham areas soon.

It aims to support children aged 7-11 and their families through a fun 10-week after school/evening programme.

Activities include cooking and tasting new foods, free exercise taster sessions at the local leisure centre and fun physical activities with young people's sports coaches.

Public health specialist Dawn Scott said: "We are doing lots of work with children and families to promote healthy living and raise awareness of childhood obesity and the methods to combat it, which include eating more healthily and being more active.

"Childhood obesity can lead to many health complaints including problems with the joints and bones, high blood pressure, high levels of blood fats and diabetes. It can also lead to low self-esteem.

"Part of our work includes promoting healthy eating and increasing physical activity and we are working in partnership with schools to reduce childhood obesity."

More from Elaine Upson on 01670 394516

### **Health trainers share good practice**

Health trainers shared good practice and ideas about tackling health inequality at a special event last week.

The conference – at Newcastle's at the Centre for Life - saw health trainers from across the region come together.

Gwen Ellison of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Public Health Network said: "NHS health trainers can offer a large number of things including

- free guidance and support
- one-to-one meetings
- information about healthy living
- suggestions about places to go and groups to join

“They can also help people get fit, lose some weight, eat a balanced diet and manage stress better.

“They are good listeners, friendly, good motivators and understand how hard it is for people to get on with making the changes they want to make.

“The conference was a really good opportunity for us to get together as a new workforce, take stock of our roles and discuss tackling health inequality.”

*More from [gwen.ellison@newcastle-pct.nhs.uk](mailto:gwen.ellison@newcastle-pct.nhs.uk)*

### **Children to brush up on dental health**

Primary school pupils in Middlesbrough are being targeted in a tooth brushing scheme that is being launched next week following a successful pilot.

The main aim of the project – Brushing Before Breakfast - is to improve oral hygiene.

It is also hoped that the good practice messages will then be extended and supported at home.

Figures for decayed, missing, and filled teeth in Middlesbrough are high in certain electoral wards, with levels way above the national target for children under five years old.

Helen Matthews, Health Improvement Specialist, said: “Changing established habits is difficult.

“But by implementing this scheme in the school setting we hope to influence habits and promote good oral hygiene.

“This also supports the broader healthy eating messages that schools are working very hard to promote and sustain.”

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