

E-bulletin: Public Health North East

Welcome to issue number 62 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

Teenage pregnancy rates down in North of Tyne

Initiatives to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies in North Tyneside, Newcastle and Northumberland are proving to be a success.

Figures recently released by the National Office of Statistics show the conception rates to women under 18 have fallen since 1998 – especially in North Tyneside.

The borough saw a 16.6% drop in the teenage conception rate from the 1998 baseline to latest figures released in 2006. Northumberland's teenage conception rate has dropped by 14.1%.

In Newcastle the number of conceptions to women under the age of 18 fell from 54.4 per 1000 women in 2005 to 52.6 per thousand in 2006.

The overall number of conceptions to women under the age of 18 declined to 242 from 257 in 2005 - a decrease of 6%.

North Tyneside's director of public health, Vivien Hollyoak, welcomed the figures on behalf of North Tyneside and Newcastle Primary Care Trusts and Northumberland Care Trust.

She said: "We are pleased with the continued reduction in teenage conception rates.

"This improvement is a result of the hard work by the primary care organisations working in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders.

"We are continuously working to drive the rates down even further and realise there is still a lot of work to be done.

"Initiatives to help us do this include Plan B, a scheme which sees some community pharmacists in Newcastle and North Tyneside providing free emergency hormonal contraception.

"In addition, the new One to One centre in Shiremoor offers all aspects of sexual health advice and support under one roof.

"The North East wide C-card free condom scheme for people under 25 has also proved to be beneficial.

"And greater access to sexual health services throughout Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland has had a positive impact on lowering teenage conception rates."

More from sam.start@northoftyne.nhs.uk

Sunderland schools battling back against obesity

Schools in Sunderland are using a series of fun and interactive classroom based sessions in a bid to tackle childhood obesity.

Sunderland City Council's Food in Schools programme focuses on teaching youngsters the benefits of healthy eating as well as how to prepare and cook simple balanced meals.

The Food in Schools team runs a coordinated programme of activities in schools across the city about portion sizes, the different food groups and how to achieve a balanced diet.

Pupils are also given cooking demonstrations from the team and help to prepare the session's ingredients.

The recipes used in the demonstrations and throughout the sessions are closely linked to the healthy school meals on offer every day across the city.

Elouise Robinson, a specialist dietician for schools at Sunderland City Council, said: "Alongside physical exercise it is extremely important that children receive good nutritional diets.

"Teaching them about the different food groups and getting them involved with food preparation from an early age can help to dispel any negative images that children may have."

Holley Park Primary is one of many schools across the city which is encouraging pupils to look at healthy food options differently.

The Washington school runs its own craft and food club on a weekly basis with pupils growing their own vegetables and then cooking them. The club also makes foods including chutneys and jams which are then sold at school fairs.

Most Sunderland schools now offer breakfast clubs that not only provide pupils with an educational theme, but also offer a healthy and nutritional start to the day.

Fruit juice and a choice of cereal, toast and fresh fruit provide students with the energy they need for the school day ahead.

But it is not just schools that are encouraging healthy eating in Sunderland. Children's Centres across the city offer many elements that concentrate on healthier lifestyles.

They work in partnership with Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust to promote the importance of having five portions of fruit or vegetables a day, eating balanced meals, oral health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy.

More from alex@adessi.co.uk

Health visitors are baby friendly

Three years' hard work has paid off for the health visiting service in Middlesbrough with the news that it has won stage one accreditation in the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly initiative.

The initiative aims to improve the support and advice given to new mums who want to breast-feed. UNICEF officials will now visit the service and talk to staff and parents, after which it will seek full accreditation.

Michelle Larkin, assistant director for children and families services, said: "Everyone has contributed to our success by attending training and taking part in the steering group set up to promote breast-feeding.

"To get stage one accreditation we had to show that staff were fully trained and gave effective, good quality advice to mums before they had their baby and consistent support and advice after the birth.

"We also had to show that all our policies and premises were baby and breast-feeding friendly.

"It's an important award and UNICEF set high standards, so this is a really good effort by everyone.

"It makes an important contribution to the health of mothers and children so building on the experience we've gained in Middlesbrough we'll soon be starting the accreditation process in Redcar and Cleveland."

More from phil.sandford@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk

Health Protection 2008

The programme outline for Health Protection 2008 at Warwick University from September 15 – 17 has been announced.

Organised by the Health Protection Agency, the conference is expected to again attract over 1200 delegates.

It will showcase the latest scientific research and new developments in protecting against infectious diseases and environmental hazards as well as preparing for health emergencies.

Topics will include:

- tuberculosis
- gastrointestinal infections
- vaccine preventable diseases
- epidemiology at the frontline
- cutting edge microbiology
- climate change impact assessment
- chemical and radiation exposure

Abstracts are now invited for consideration for oral presentations and posters in the above categories and other health protection topics.

More at <http://www.healthprotectionconference.org.uk>

Holistic approach needed to tackle alcohol abuse

One of the UK's leading authorities on alcohol misuse explained this week why a new approach was essential if we are to deal with one of the biggest challenges facing the UK.

Kevan Martin, chief executive of the North East Regional Alcohol Forum, was addressing a high level audience of experts in the field at a special alcohol abuse symposium hosted by Northumbria University's Centre for Public Policy.

He set up the national charity after the system failed to help him through his own journey out of addiction.

He said: "It is essential that we move towards a more holistic approach to tackling alcohol misuse.

“It’s pointless giving people detox alone as it just doesn’t work in isolation - you have to look at all other aspects of life at the same time as providing treatment. Relationships, housing and debt are just some of the external factors which can all impact on a person’s treatment programme and ultimately on their recovery.”

Some of the strategic priorities for reducing the risks of alcohol abuse were discussed at the event, which was attended by policy-makers, health and community workers and the police.

The symposium focused on alcohol misuse in its broadest sense, with a specific interest in young people and extreme/binge drinking.

It also looked at the links between alcohol and domestic violence and alcohol policy within a regional context.

The event was organised by the Centre for Public Policy who have had a team of staff working with NERAF on a major project to chart the impact of alcohol on every aspect of a dependent’s life - from their initial approach to the charity through their journey to recovery.

Rob Wiggins, business manager at Northumbria’s Centre for Public Policy, said: “This project is part of a major initiative called *Urban Regeneration: Making a Difference*, which aims to tackle some of the real and very complex problems facing communities across the North of England.

“It has been an excellent opportunity for us to help make a real difference to people’s lives as well as providing a greater understanding of the key issues - and we believe this could eventually become the template for a national model of excellence.”

More from ruth.laing@northumbria.ac.uk

£2m occupational health centre set for Newcastle

Residents of Newcastle are set to benefit from the development of a £2m occupational health centre of excellence.

The new facility will help improve their physical, mental and social well-being as well as reduce health problems amongst the workforce.

Newcastle Primary Care Trust has been chosen to pilot the project and awarded £2.07m from the Department of Health to develop the service which will include two centres and two mobile occupational health units.

The centre will bring together occupational health services with spinal awareness, podiatry, counselling, physiotherapy and education and training facilities for health professionals and employers.

The centre of excellence aims to be the main provider of occupational health services to small businesses in Newcastle and the North East

Dr Mike Guy, NHS North of Tyne medical director, said: “It is fantastic news that we have been chosen to pilot the scheme.

“It highlights the importance of occupational health services and their important role in supporting health, safety and well-being in both the workforce and the community.

“The centre of excellence will help to reduce ill health and accidents, and improve employee morale and performance in the NHS and beyond.”

Occupational health advice from the NHS to businesses and the community can significantly reduce health problems amongst staff.

Typical work includes the management of sickness absence, rehabilitation, and providing advice on a wide range of workplace issues.

More from sam.start@northoftyne.nhs.uk

Patients feel the benefits of new technology

Patients and NHS organisations in the North East are already feeling the benefits of huge investment in new information technology, according to a new report.

The *National Programme for IT Benefits Statement 2006-07* shows that it is helping to provide patients across the country with better, safer care by improving the way information is stored and shared.

The statement also says that savings of over £208 million have been made for the NHS in England thanks to new IT.

The digital picture archiving communications system, which enables images such as x-rays and scans to be stored electronically and viewed on screens, is now used in every hospital trust in the region.

It means that patients wait less time to receive their results, compared to the old film-based system. Clinicians are able to share images, retrieve them more quickly and have higher quality pictures for assessing medical conditions.

Other systems which are benefiting local people include the *Choose and Book* system, which enables patients to choose a convenient time, date and place for their first outpatient appointment when they are initially referred by their GP.

The electronic prescription service allows GPs and nurses to send prescriptions electronically to a pharmacy of the patient's choice, making the process safer and more convenient.

And in many places, patients moving to the area or changing GP practice are having their notes transferred to their new GP within minutes, instead of the six weeks or more it used to take using paper-based methods.

The national programme has helped the NHS in England to reduce the costs of buying and replacing IT systems and software licences, and in maintaining hardware.

The overall savings to the NHS from the National Programme for IT, based on calculations to March 2007, are predicted to be £1.04 billion by March 2014.

More at www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk