

Raising Healthy Kids

April 3 - 9 is National Public Health Week

Over the last 100 years, average life expectancy in the U.S. has increased by approximately 40 years, from age 46 to age 77. Only seven of those years can be attributed to improved disease care and management. The rest of this change is a direct result of public health interventions such as improved preventive care and environmental conditions in the U.S. As communities developed and were enhanced in the early 1900s, the nation's health was dramatically improved.

In the 21st century, there are still many public health challenges affecting our population, especially children, as the health and well being of a child depend heavily on the environment in which they live. For example:

- In the last 20 years, the prevalence of **childhood asthma** has increased dramatically. Researchers estimate that eliminating risk factors for asthma in the home would reduce asthma in the U.S. and save \$402 million each year;
- According to results of the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the percentage of children and adolescents who are defined as **overweight** has more than doubled since the early 1970s; and
- The impact of the built environment has a greater impact on minorities and low-income communities. Without access to quality housing, disadvantaged populations are disproportionately exposed to lead, pest, air pollutants, contaminants and great social risk.

Well-designed communities are essential in preventing injury, obesity, air pollution and disparities in access to and equity of care to ensure that children achieve optimal health and development. Many common pediatric conditions such as asthma, lead poisoning and



obesity are associated with risk factors linked to a child's built environment yet, parents, community leaders and policy-makers do not always make the connection to how building and land use could ultimately impact the health of our children.

The national observance of National Public Health Week (NPHW) 2006 is April 3-9. During NPHW, APHA will

aim to improve the understanding of the relationship between built environments—homes, schools, parks and community design—and the health and safety of children by promoting solutions that families, communities and policy-makers can use to improve children's health in their communities. During NPHW, each day will focus on the relationship between the built environment and a core children's health issue, with additional focus on effective solutions based on case studies from model communities.

- **Monday:** Designing Healthy Communities: Raising Healthy Kids
- **Tuesday:** Surrounding Our Kids with Equal Opportunities
- **Wednesday:** Surrounding Our Kids with Physical Activity
- **Thursday:** Surrounding Our Kids with Safety
- **Friday:** Surrounding Our Kids with Clean Air

Children benefit from a good built environment. Green spaces, availability of bicycle and walking paths, healthy homes and schools, and overall safety and aesthetics of a community play an important role in children's health. During NPHW, APHA with its partners will provide tools to create building blocks in developing healthy communities and healthy kids.

Pinellas County Health Department

Public Health Week

What If There Was **NO** Health Department?

What does *your* health department do? If you ask the average citizen, he or she would probably have a hard time answering that question. So, let's explore the question, "What if there was no health department?"

You get out of bed in the morning and notice several bumps on your skin where mosquitoes have bitten you during the night. You wonder if you may have contracted West Nile Virus. Some old tires in your neighbor's yard provide an ideal place for the mosquito that transmits the disease. Because there is no health department, there is no State health lab to check to see if you have contracted West Nile Virus from a mosquito bite.

Your wife is pregnant and needs assistance to make sure she and her unborn baby receive the nutritious diet they need. There is no health department to help your wife during her pregnancy through the WIC program, Healthy Start and other programs for moms and children.

Your two children are in the other room sick with measles or mumps. There was no health department to give immunizations to protect them against these diseases.

You decide to pick up an egg biscuit on your way to work and the egg on the biscuit makes you sick by mid-morning due to food-borne illness. There was no health department to train the food service workers on proper

cooking techniques and food hygiene.

Your co-worker next to you is coughing his head off and occasionally spitting up blood because he has contracted TB and doesn't even know it. There is no health department to give TB tests or to treat and control the disease.

Several other co-workers have the flu. There is no health department to help you learn ways to protect yourself and your family from catching this contagious disease.

The telephone rings at work and you learn that a relative has contracted a sexually transmitted disease. There

is no health department for counseling, examination and treatment for the disease.

Later in the day, your wife calls to tell you that her sister has been diagnosed with diabetes. There is no health department to help her learn more about the disease and how to prepare meals that are right for a diabetic's unique needs.

Before going to bed, a news bulletin comes on TV informing you that a terrorist has released a biological weapon.. The report indicated that it is probably small-pox. There is no health department to set up mass vaccination clinics. Also, volunteers to staff the clinics have not been trained because there is no health department to oversee the training.

You finally decide to just go to bed and worry yourself to sleep because you haven't had a flu shot in quite sometime. You always got it at the health department, but now there is no health department.

You lie awake hearing the drip of a water faucet that you know is bringing contaminated water from your well into your home. There is no health department to keep the supply safe. You toss and turn, and try to get some sleep anyway.

When you awake, you realize that all of this was only a dream. You telephone your local health department just to make sure. The friendly voice on the phone answers, "**This is the Health Department, how can we help you?**" You breathe a sigh of relief. It was only a dream.



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