

Dickinson-Iron District Health Department PUBLIC HEALTH PRESS



Health Health Disease
~Protection * Education * Prevention~

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~An Active Member of the Dickinson-Iron County Collaborative Boards~

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National Public Health Week, April 5-11, 2004

Eliminating Health Disparities Communities Moving from Statistics to Solutions

Our Mission

“To assure the highest possible level of health for the people of the communities we serve.”

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“Eliminating Health Disparities” is the 2004 theme for National Public Health Week, celebrated April 5-11, 2004. This national celebration provides us with an opportunity to recognize the contributions of public health to the nation’s well-being as a whole and also help focus public attention on major health issues in our communities. While we have much to be thankful for, we also have much work to do to create the conditions within which all of our community residents can be healthy.

Throughout history, public health has been making a difference in the lives of Americans. Due in part to public health, the United States has been successful in identifying and addressing patterns of disease, illness and injury in populations. As a result, Americans now live 25 years longer. Public health professionals and agencies use this time to celebrate the successes of public health as well as bring attention to health issues that have serious consequences on Americans. During National Public Health Week, public health professionals will celebrate the success of public health and inform the public about serious health concerns affecting Americans. This year, we are focusing our attention on

By Richard J. Thoun, RS, MPH

the issue of eliminating health disparities.

Health disparities have persisted for years despite major advances in public health, biotechnology, and economic wealth and prosperity and the overall improvement in the health status of the American population over the last century. Disparities in health are a considerable cost to society. Premature deaths can have devastating social and economic effects on families. Disparities in disease, disability, and death for six key health conditions (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, breast/cervical cancer, HIV/AIDS, immunization, and infant mortality) alone are enormous: death rates for racial and ethnic minority populations due to these key conditions are up to nearly 8 times the rates for non-minority populations.

Did you know that people who live in rural areas often have more health problems than people in cities? People in low-income communities often have less healthy surroundings than people in other communities. Low-income communities are often located in or near polluting industrial areas and have cheap older housing where lead paint and pests are a threat. Environmental factors ranging from tobacco

smoke to chemicals to dietary habits can cause serious health issues. In many cases, rural residents don’t have easy access to doctors and other needed health care services. Fortunately, many communities are finding creative ways to solve this problem.

Locally, Dickinson County is moving from statistics to solutions. The Medical Care Access Coalition of Dickinson County is moving forward with a model program that seeks to eliminate one of the health disparities facing low income uninsured residents of the community, access to health care. The program will use the volunteer services of medical professionals and a network to other medical services (such as donated radiology, donated/ reduced cost prescription medications, laboratory work).

The Health Department will also be offering fact sheets to the public through lobby displays that characterize disparities in cancer, diabetes, the environment, gender, health literacy, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, infant mortality, race/ethnicity, and in rural areas. Stop by and see us! Additional information on health disparities is available at www.apha.org.

“Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.”

March is Parenting Awareness Month

Joyce Ziegler, RNC, Public Health Coordinator, Member of Dickinson-Iron Children's Advocacy Network, Member of Parenting Fair 2004 Planning Committee

"Parenting is for a Lifetime" is the theme for this year's parenting awareness activities.

The State of Michigan has declared March as Parenting Awareness Month since 1993.

The Vision is: Every person, everywhere, every day understands their responsibility in raising Michigan's children.

The Mission is: Parenting Awareness Michigan (PAM) is a year round statewide campaign to promote awareness, education, and resources- through state outreach and local efforts- emphasizing the importance of effective parenting in nurturing children to become healthy, caring, contributing citizens.

Many wonderful educational tools and ideas are available from the Parenting Awareness Michigan (PAM) Campaign. They are free and easily available by calling 1-800-626-4636. You can visit

www.preventionnetwork.org and also call 1-800-968-4968 for more information about Parenting Awareness Michigan.

Although this is a state and local collaborative effort, local participation is critical in reaching



parents and all those who "parent" our children. In Dickinson and Iron Counties local effort resulted in the 6th Annual Parenting Fair scheduled for March 11, 2004 at the West Iron Community Library in Iron River, Michigan.

Support is provided from our local Children's Advocacy Network and by the many volunteer hours from committed youth and adults.

This year's fair will be an all day affair, with information booths for parents to visit. Expert speakers from the community will provide information on parenting and health issues. Local

high school students will provide activities for younger children. A car seat safety clinic will also be held on site.

Parenting is really "For a Lifetime" and all citizens can play a part in raising our community's children. Information provided in the 2004 Parenting Awareness Month Organizers' Packet includes helpful information on child growth and development, and parenting and discipline issues. Just as important is valuable information for parenting teens, talking to them about difficult issues such as substance abuse, and information on some of the newest brain research out there about teens.

Visit

www.preventionnetwork.org, or call 1-800-968-4968 for more information. You can call Dickinson-Iron District Health Department at 906-265-4156 for more information about our local area activities, or to learn about the Dickinson-Iron Children's Advocacy Network.

Celebrate Earth Day — April 22, 2004

Source: MSN Encarta

Earth Day, an event first observed internationally on April 22, 1970, to emphasize the necessity for the conservation of the world's natural resources. Starting as a student-led campus movement, initially observed on March 21, Earth Day has become a major educational and media event. Environmentalists use it as an occasion to sum up current environ-

mental problems of the planet: the pollution of air, water, and soils; the destruction of habitats; the decimation of hundreds of thousands of plant and animal species; and the depletion of nonrenewable resources. The emphasis is on solutions that will slow and possibly reverse the negative effects of human activities. Such solutions include recycling of manufactured

materials, fuel and energy conservation, banning the use of harmful chemicals, halting the destruction of major habitats such as rain forests, and protecting endangered species.

"Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them." ~Bill Vaughn, quoted in Jon Winokur, The Portable Curmudgeon, 1987

"Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy."

Vision Screening—Why it's Important for Preschoolers

Margie Surface, RNC, Public Health Coordinator

Vision is, quite literally, the mechanism by which children connect to the world around them! Unfortunately, there are a whole lot of kids not properly 'connected' because they have a vision problem. More specifically, a child may have difficulty seeing a chalkboard, or projections from an overhead projector, or have trouble reading a book, or writing, or participating in sports. Vision disorders are the fourth most common disability in the U.S. and the most prevalent handicapping condition in childhood. The Michigan Department of Community Health screening program that our health department performs by our very capable and caring technician, helps to reduce this problem in our communities. The Public Health Code and Rules require that we screen children for visual acuity and eye muscle function at least once for preschool-aged children and in the odd grades in school beginning in the first grade and continuing through drivers education training. Some background information as to why we screen children for visual acuity and muscle problems might help you understand the importance of our service.

Visual acuity is what we are referring to when we say someone has "20/20" eyesight. Acuity can be thought of as clarity. That is, how clear is our sight? Are the images we see clear and sharp, or are they blurred and fuzzy? We're also checking the refractive status of the children we screen. Refractive status refers to how the eye bends and focuses the light coming in. That is, does the eye focus light clearly on the retina? If you have ever used a magnifying glass, you know that the lens bends the light to make a larger image. If the lens is too close to the object you are looking at, or too far away, the image is not clear. The eyes focus the incoming light on the retina. If the point of focus is in front of (nearsighted), or behind (farsighted) the retina, the images will not be sharp and clear. Acuity and refractive status will change as the child grows and develops. The visual acuity/two-line difference test screens for these two things.

Screening for muscle function includes checking our eye alignment and movement. We have two eyes and both must be able to work together. Each eye "takes a picture" of the world around us. The brain then fuses the two different pictures into what we call "sight." If the eyes are not aligned, or do not move appropriately, then the brain may become confused. The brain may have difficulty fusing the two different im-

ages into a single "sight picture." When this happens, one result could be that preschool children could develop amblyopia, or lazy eye. Again, amblyopia is responsible for more loss of vision in people under the age of 45 than all other eye diseases and trauma combined. Amblyopia begins to develop in early childhood, and if allowed to progress without treatment, can cause a permanent loss of vision! The earlier it is detected, the greater the possibility of successful treatment. One of our primary goals in our vision screening program is to reduce, and possibly eliminate, suffering resulting from amblyopia.

To help us accomplish this goal we would like your help in outreaching our preschool population (ages 3-5) and encouraging their parents to call us to learn more about our preschool hearing and vision screening clinics we offer each spring and summer.

There is no cost for the screenings, and for those children entering kindergarten in the fall, it is a requirement for school entry.

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Public Health Week



April 5-11, 2004



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