

PUBLIC HEALTH WORKS!

TALKING ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH

Public health week provides a good opportunity to talk with your community leaders and residents about public health, what it does and how it works in your community. The speaking points below may be useful for you; they will work best when they are personalized to reflect the activities in your county.

What is Public Health?

- Public health protects and improves communities by preventing epidemics and the spread of disease, promoting healthy lifestyles for children and families, protecting against environmental hazards, assuring high quality health care services and preparing for and responding to emergencies.
- Public health is concerned with protecting the health of entire populations rather than individuals. These populations can be as small as a local neighborhood, or as big as an entire country.
- An increase in life expectancy, the worldwide reduction in infant and child mortality and the elimination of or reduction of many communicable disease are some of the dramatic achievements of public health in the 20th century.

How does Public Health work?

- Public health professionals try to prevent problems from happening or re-occurring through implementing educational programs, developing policies, administering services, and conducting research.

- Public Health Professionals are:
 - Health commissioners/directors
 - Environmental sanitarians, technicians or engineers
 - Public Health Nurses
 - Epidemiologists
 - Public Health Educators
 - Doctors
 - Nutritionists
 - Scientists
 - Dentists and dental hygienists

- Public Health professionals work in many different settings, including state and local health departments, hospitals, health clinics, universities and laboratories and schools.

What do Local Health Departments do?

- The New York State and Local Health Departments (LHDs) have the primary responsibility to promote and protect the health of the public in New York State.
- Local Health Departments protect you from everyday threats to your health. The safe tap water you drink and food you eat at restaurants, the response to a health emergency or bioterrorism, and the prevention of disease are all made possible by the local health department.
- LHDs protect the health of entire towns, cities and counties. They focus on health threats that can hurt everyone, such as contagious disease or dangerous unsanitary conditions. For example, when a contagious disease or epidemic like West Nile Virus or the flu threatens your neighborhood or school your local public health department acts to stop it from spreading.
- LHDs help keep children healthy. They encourage mothers to get regular prenatal care to give their babies a healthy start. They make sure children get shots to prevent childhood diseases and regular check ups from the family doctor.
- LHDs teach community residents how to protect their own health. They help people exercise more, eat right, quit smoking and wash hands to keep from spreading illness.
- LHDs address the emerging health issues of our time. For example, LHDs address childhood obesity and other chronic diseases, ensure widespread

vaccination for influenza, and help communities prepare for natural or manmade emergencies.

How is Public Health Different from Health Care?

- Doctors and hospitals take care of people one at a time. LHDs protect the health of entire communities. LHDs focus on preventing illnesses and resolving health threats that affect everyone.
- LHDs must always be prepared to deal with the unknown, whether that is a new threat like SARS or a sudden terrorism attack. They protect you from disease and harm before, during and after emergencies.

Who is responsible for paying for Public Health?

- Local health departments are funded by the local, state and federal governments. Investment by local government is essential to get state support for county activities.

Resources

What is Public Health: <http://www.whatispublichealth.org/>, a website developed by the Associations of the Schools of Public Health

Public Health Communications Toolkit, developed by the National Association of City and County Health Officials

http://www.naccho.org/advocacy/MarketingPublicHealth_toolkit_factsheets.cfm

National Public Health Week 2006: Designing Healthy Communities, Raising Healthy Kids, Tool Kit developed by the American Public Health Organization

http://www.apha.org/nphw/2006/pg_toolkit.htm

Public Health Tools, developed by the NYS Department of Health, available on the DOH secure website for county health departments. From the HIN homepage, select Hot Topics and it will take you to a page with a link to Public Health Tools.