

Children's Environmental Health - The Canadian Experience



**Joint Meeting of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC)
and the Expert Advisory Board on Children's Health
and the Environment in North America**

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Outline of Presentation

- Canadian Profile
- Policy Context
- Development process
- Overview of Strategy
- Where we are at
- Lessons learned

Canadian Profile

- Land mass 9 093 507 sq km,
- Population: 30 million
- Aboriginal Peoples are 3% of population
- 77% of Canadians live urban areas
- Canada has 10 provinces & 3 territories
 - Some shared areas of jurisdiction
- Over 5,000 municipal governments

Canadian Profile

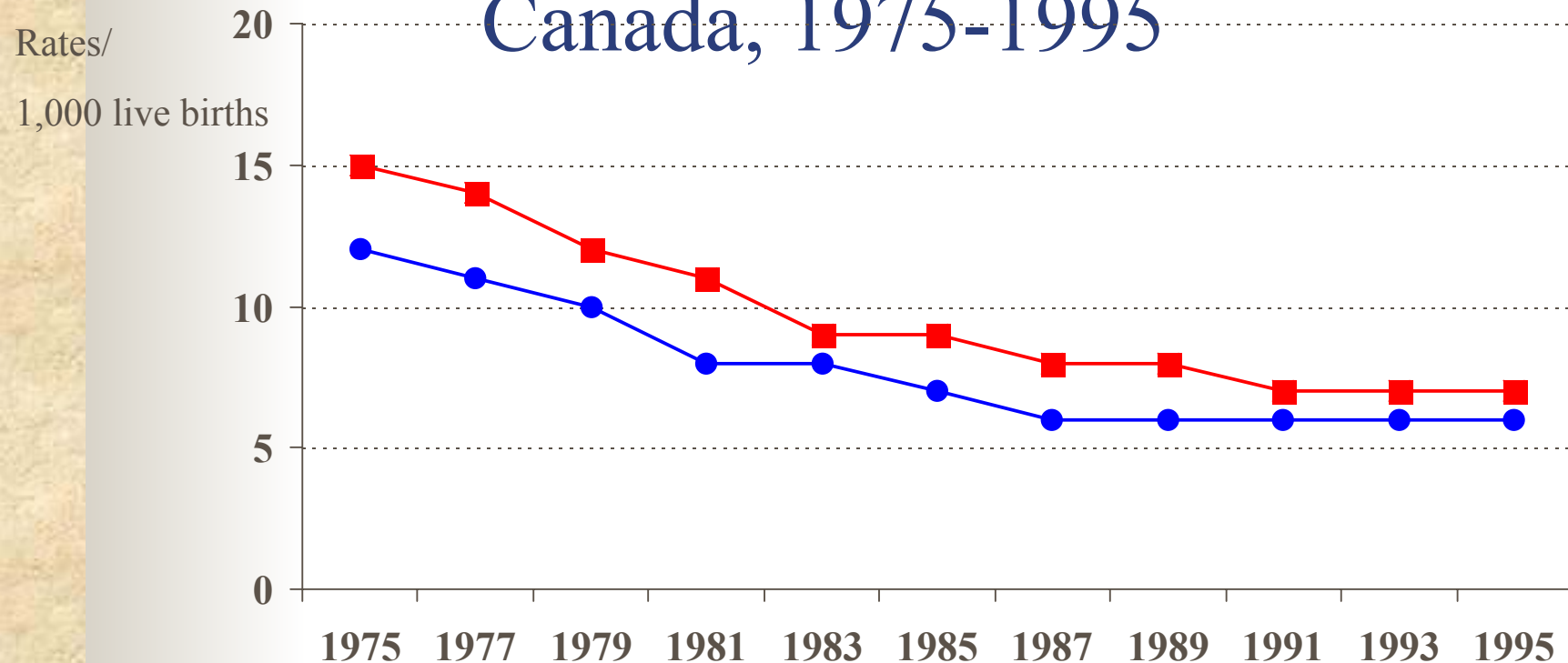
- Children (0-19) represent 26% of the population
- 35% of all Aboriginal people are children under 15 years
- Proportion of children as a percentage of the total Canadian population continues to decline
- Most Canadian children have good health status, but some worrisome trends

Canadian Profile

- Infant Mortality rate (1996)
 - 5.6/1000 live births
- Life Expectancy (1998)
 - Males: 75 years
 - Females: 81 years

Infant Death Rates

Canada, 1975-1995



Male

1975	1977	1979	1981	1983	1985	1987	1989	1991	1993	1995
15	14	12	11	9	9	8	8	7	7	7
12	11	10	8	8	7	6	6	6	6	6

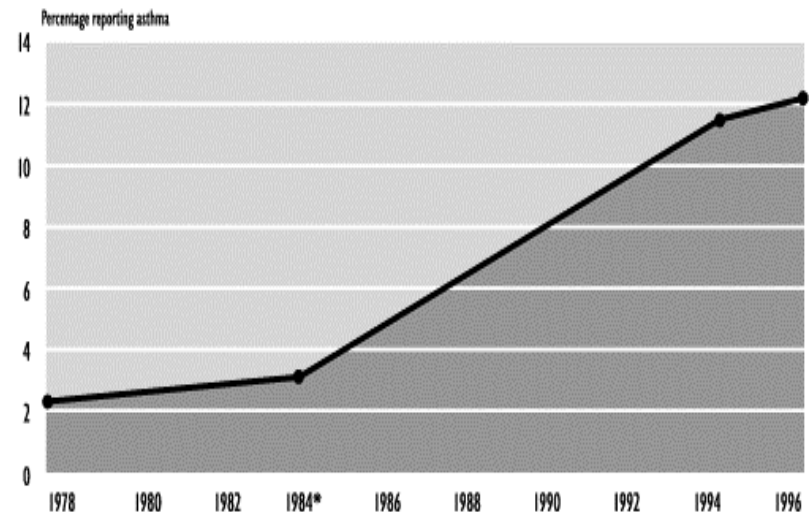
Female



Asthma

- In Canada, 4-fold increased prevalence in 20 years.
- 1 million children have asthma resulting in 28,000 hospitalizations per year (1996)

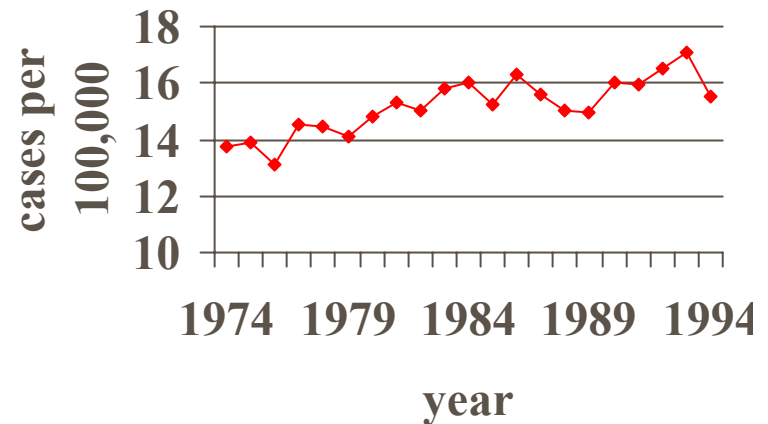
Figure 1 Reported Asthma Prevalence, ages 0-19 years, Canada, 1978-1996



Childhood Cancer

- 2nd highest cause of death for age 1-19
- Approximately, 1300 new cases/year - leukemia, brain cancer, lymphomas, other

Cancer incidence rates,
age 0-19



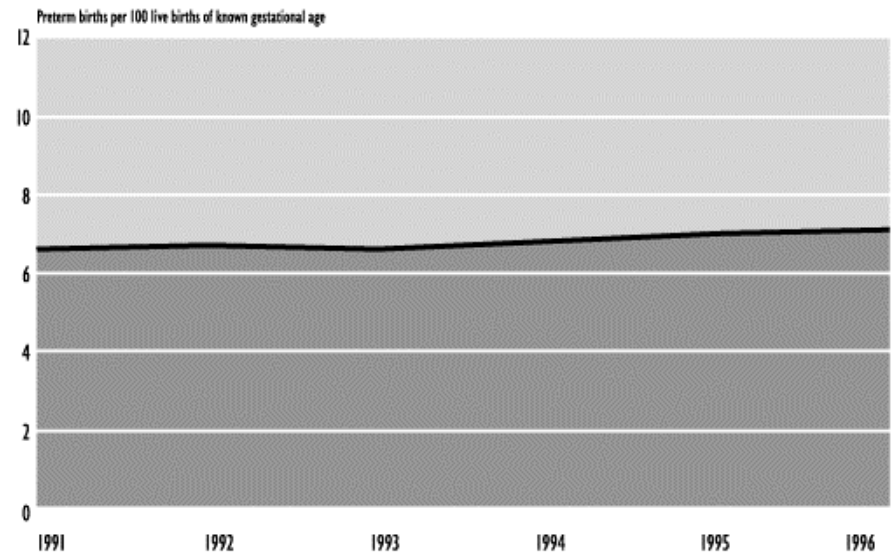
Neurobehavioral and Developmental Effects

- 28% of children (0-11) have at least one identifiable learning or behavioral problem
- 16% of children aged 4-5 show delayed vocabulary skills
- Only 23% of the 3,000 high-production chemicals have been tested for potential neurobehavioral effects.

Low Birth Weight, Birth Defects

- 30,000 hospitalizations and 1500 deaths per year
- 5.8% of live births are low birthweight (1996)
- major causes of long-term disability

Figure 3 Preterm Birth Rates, Canada (excluding Ontario), 1991-1996





Health Canada's Role in Children's Environmental Health

- Hazardous Products Act and Regulations
- Pest Control Products Act and Regulations
- Radiation Emitting Devices Act and Regulations
- Food and Drugs Act
- Tobacco Act and Regulations

Environment Canada's Role in Children's Environmental Health

- Minister often associated with environmental health issues
- Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA)(Jointly managed with Health Canada) - Risk Management for “Toxics” and other substances (sulphur in gasoline)
- Environmental monitoring data for use in health risk assessments
- Canadian lead for international environment meetings, resolutions etc.
- Environmental predictions (smog forecasts, uvb forecasts)
- Produce animal data that has potential as early warning for humans

Canadian Policy Context

- Canadians view the environment as a health issue and are concerned that children's health is affected by environmental pollutants
- Increasing pressure from NGOs and the public to address environmental threats to children's health
- Calls for action from within government
- International momentum: Environment Leaders of the Eight, the CEC, the WHO - Europe and the U.S.

In the News

MONTREAL **The Gazette** SINCE 1778

December 12, 2001

Smog tied to birth defects

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

February 25, 2002

**We're poisoning our children
Today's produce is full of toxic residue**

MONTREAL **The Gazette** SINCE 1778

June 25, 2000

**Children most vulnerable
to MMT**

THE TORONTO STAR

June 2, 2000

**A toxic view of childhood;
Report shows alarming
exposure to contaminants**

CJOH
CTV

May 25, 2000

**Children Not Protected
From Pesticides and
Pollution**

Canadian Policy Context

- National Children's Agenda
- 2001 Speech from the Throne - Government outlined the importance of linkages between environment and health and recognized children as vulnerable population
- Federal activities include:
 - Regulatory: Hazardous Products Act, Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and Food and Drugs Act
 - Non-regulatory: research, surveillance, federal guidelines, education and risk communication.

Process for the Development of a CEH Strategy

- Inventory of federal activities
- Gaps Analysis
- National Workshop on Children's Environmental Health
- Interdepartmental collaboration
- Consultation with key stakeholders and provincial partners
- Development of a Federal Strategy

Elements of a CEH Strategy

Strategy currently under consideration:

- Knowledge Development
- Immediate Actions
- Partnership and Outreach
- Federal Coordination and Leadership

Expected Outcomes

- Government-wide leadership and coordination on children's environmental health issues
- Increased development of a strong scientific knowledge base to improve risk management activities
- Increased capacity to educate Canadians through outreach activities

Where are we at?

- Strategy is under consideration
- Currently addressing CEH issues through other means
- Promoting CEH agenda at the international level

Current CEH Activities

- Advancing the research agenda
 - Priorities for research identified (June 2000 workshop)
 - Canadian Children's Environmental Health Research Workshop to take place March 17-19, 2002
- Some risk management activities (guidelines, regulations) place emphasis on children and women of childbearing age
- Outreach activities focus on indoor air quality in homes and schools, safe use of consumer products, protection from UV radiation. Key CEH outreach activity:
 - Voluntary Sector Initiative – CEH Initiative

Lessons Learned

- Scientific base is key to action
- Public support and recognition adds momentum
- Linking environment and health issues and sectors can be beneficial
- International fora can motivate the domestic agenda
- Ability to advance issue in an informal context
- Avoid duplication of effort, build on existing approaches