



The Compass



Guiding you to the freedom of health
Erie County Department of Health & Wellness Newsletter

Edition 1.1

February 2002



I would like to take this opportunity to share with you a new vision called, "Compass to Health." "Compass to Health" is a new focus that is designed to keep our strongest asset, our county employees, active and healthy. Employee Health has been charged with this responsibility and now is referred to as "**Employee Health and Wellness.**" This newsletter is one means of promoting health in our employees, their families and the community. Some of the other initiatives are:

- Provide technical expertise and leadership.
- Conduct research and surveillance to enhance prevention.
- Implement prevention strategies.
- Develop and advocate sound public health policies and procedures.
- Promote healthy behavior.
- Foster safe and healthy work environments.
- Foster compliance with PESH, OSHA and other regulatory entities.
- Detect and investigate health and safety problems.

I'm pleased to welcome this new enthusiasm towards health and wellness and encourage you to join me in following the "Compass to Health."

Health Commissioner Billittier's Wellness Message:

The Erie County Department of Health welcomes you to the "**Compass To Health,**" our employee newsletter that is part of an overall program to encourage healthy choices and lifestyles. The newsletter will focus on issues and activities designed to guide county workers along the road to a healthier lifestyle. In this issue I will address the subject of asthma.

I hope you take the time to look over this newsletter and give serious consideration to the suggestions and recommendations. Remember, you hold the key to a healthier lifestyle and together we can launch ourselves into a more fulfilling life.

ASTHMA

The number of people who have asthma in Western New York can fill HSBC arena nearly five times to capacity. It is the leading serious chronic illness among children. In an average size classroom, at least 2 children will have asthma. In 1998, a person died from asthma about every hour and a half. The death rate for African Americans is three times higher than that of whites. In 1998, direct healthcare costs totaled more than 11 billion dollars. Asthma does not need to limit the asthmatics enjoyment of life though. Staying informed, making lifestyle changes, and working closely with a healthcare professional will help the asthmatic to take control.



**Strive
For Five
5 Fruits &
Vegetables
Each Day**

Health Commissioner Billittier's Wellness Message: (Continued)

Asthma is a chronic (ongoing) lung condition that is characterized by progressive airway inflammation that results in recurring acute episodes (attacks) of breathing problems such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath. An Asthma attack is a series of events that result in narrowed airways. Those events include: swelling of the lining, tightening of the muscle, and increased production of mucus in the airway. The episodes occur because the airway overreacts to certain "triggers." Asthma attacks can be mild, moderate, or even life threatening. A person with a chronic cough may actually have asthma.

Gaining control of asthma starts with recognizing the triggers. Some of the triggers are:

- Cigarette and other tobacco smoke/other pollutants
- Respiratory infections/colds
- Allergic reactions to pollen, animal dander, dust and dust mites, and molds
- Exposure to cold air or extreme weather changes
- Excitement, stress, or vigorous exercise
- Perfumes, paint and cleaning solutions

After exposure to the triggers, symptoms rarely develop abruptly, but rather, progress over a period of hours and days. In some cases, the airways can become seriously obstructed by the time the patient even calls the doctor.

Diagnosing asthma is based on a thorough medical history and measuring how efficiently the person can force air out of the lungs. Testing also needs to be done to identify the triggers that initiate the attacks. Because the onset of the attack can develop over several days or weeks, identifying the triggers can become complicated. Often, the triggers *cannot* be identified at all.

Ideally, the first line of defense in the treatment of asthma is avoiding the triggers but often, the utilization of medications is necessary. Asthma medications fall into 2 categories: long-term-control and quick-relief. Long-term-control medications are taken on a daily basis and work to control the underlying airway inflammation. Quick-relief medications work quickly to help open the airway. Medications are made to be taken orally (pill, liquid) or inhaled (nebulizer, metered-dose inhaler.) Steroid inhalers are important to the treatment of asthma and their use should be discussed with your health care professional.

A well-balanced diet will help resist infections and deliver more oxygen to the body. Keeping a diary of symptoms, occurrence of attacks, triggers, and effectiveness of medications can help the asthmatic and their healthcare professional to discover what will be the most effective treatment plan for them. Recent collaborative efforts by asthma management specialists from Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Western New York, Independent Health, Univera Healthcare, the Niagara Health Quality Coalition, and the American Lung Association of Western New York, have produced region-wide guidelines that can only lead to better care for asthma sufferers. Learning to live with asthma is not about limits; it's about life.

Employee Blood Pressure Screening

Monday - Friday 1:30 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Employee Health Rath Building Room 225

It's not too late for the flu shot

Flu Shots are available to Erie County Employees
Free of charge in Employee Health
Rath Building - Room 225
8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.



Preparing for Pregnancy

Do you know of someone who is pregnant or planning to become pregnant? There are steps that they can take now to help their baby be born healthy. Here are some of the things they will need to know:

FOLIC ACID: Taking 400 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid every day before conception and in early pregnancy may help to prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord. A woman should take a multivitamin every day and eat a healthy diet to get the required amount.

DIET: It's always important to eat a balanced diet but especially before and during pregnancy. It should include foods rich in folic acid, like fortified cereals, leafy green vegetables, orange juice, and peanuts*.

WELLNESS CHECKUP: If a woman is thinking about becoming pregnant, it's a good idea to get a checkup first. This way, her health can be evaluated and any problems can be taken care of. It's also important for a woman to tell her physician about her family health history and conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and infections. These should be well under control before pregnancy.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES: Adopting healthy lifestyle habits are essential for a woman who is pregnant or considering pregnancy. This means no smoking or drinking of alcohol. Check with a health care provider before taking any prescription or over the counter medication. It's also essential to avoid toxic chemicals in the environment.

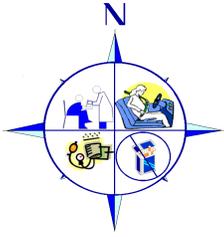
WEIGHT: It's best for women who are planning to have a baby to achieve their ideal weight before they conceive. Getting plenty of exercise is important too.

IMMUNIZATIONS: It's best to find out what immunizations are needed and to get them before conceiving.

STRESS: Keeping stress to a minimum during pregnancy is sound advice for both mother and baby.

*Any woman with a history of nut allergies should avoid eating peanuts or peanut products at all times.

Employee Health



We would like to take a moment to introduce you to the new employee health logo, or as we refer to it “the employee health compass.” In the center of the compass are 4 different pictures. These pictures are our current target activities related to employee health. As we target new activities for employee health, the pictures will change. So keep your eye on this logo. In the left upper corner and going clockwise we have an employee receiving a flu vaccination, buckling of seat belts, smoking cessation and monitoring of blood pressure. Over the next several months you will see information related to each of these items. On the front of this newsletter you'll see that Employee Health in room 225 of the Rath Building is now available to check blood pressure of employees daily from 1:30—3:00 pm. Additionally, smoking cessation classes are now being offered on a quarterly basis. If you haven't already signed up for the February classes, the next one will begin in May. Classes typically run from 12:00 noon to 1:00 pm on the 9th floor of the Rath Building. These sessions are open to ALL County employees. Please call Colleen at 858-4921 or Allison at 858-2919 to sign-up. Support classes are also offered following the cessation classes for added motivation.

We had several successful flu vaccine clinics this season. Over 500 county employees were immunized. Remember though, the workplace is often a weak link in the fight to prevent the contraction and spread of infections. Hand washing is recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as one of the most important means of preventing germs from spreading.

The staff in employee health is excited about the new enthusiasm and support for employee health activities. We are looking forward to the challenges that are ahead of us to supply you with quality health and safety services. Have a safe and healthy day.



No time for exercise?

Try the stairs!

Brought to you by:

Erie County Employee Health & Wellness



When: Feb. 14, 2002

Time: 10am–2pm

...because we care about **your health!**

Where: Rath Building Lobby

What: Free screenings such as Blood Pressure, Glucose, Cholesterol and Bone Density plus Educational Information on many subjects

Wellness Day 2002

To pre-register call:

x6674

8:30am–4:30pm

2/1, 2/4, & 2/5



Sponsored by the Erie County Department of Health
with support from the Catholic Health System and the
Osteoporosis Resource Center of WNY

What is the leading cause of death? HEART DISEASE - the #1 killer February is American Heart Month

Are You At Risk?

Age - Are you a male over the age of 55+ / a female over the age of 65+?

Sex - Men have a higher risk until women reach menopause. Then it is equal.

Family History - Did an immediate male relative younger than 55 or an immediate female relative younger than 65 have a heart attack?

Lack of regular exercise - Do you exercise less than 30 minutes a day - 3 times per week?

High Cholesterol - is it greater than 200 mg?

Smoking - Do you smoke or have quite smoking within 6 month?

Overweight - Are you 10 lbs. or more overweight or have a BMI greater than 25?

Diabetes - Are you diabetic? Have you had your glucose tested recently?

High Blood Pressure - Is it greater than 140/90? Do you know what your blood pressure is?

Poor Stress Management - Do you mull over things rather than let them roll off your back?

✓ **Know the answers to ALL these questions!**

✓ **Talk to your doctor about them!**

Most Common Symptoms seen in men & women:

Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, tightness, burning or other aching/pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or comes and goes.

Other common places for discomfort to be felt, besides the chest include neck and jaw; inside the arm and shoulder (left side more frequently than right); upper abdomen (often mistaken for indigestion pain); and between the shoulder blades.

Often there is unusual fatigue, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness, clamminess, sweating, and nausea.

What to do if you are experiencing these symptoms:

If you are experiencing these symptoms for more than a few minutes and/or do not get relief from your nitroglycerin pills or spray - CALL 911.

Less Common SYMPTOMS (more often seen in women) . . .

Feel funny - just don't feel right. Stomach or abdominal pain or burning. Vague chest discomfort.

Nausea, dizziness or light-headedness. Increasing shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.

Increasing fatigue, unexplained anxiety, and weakness. Palpitations, cold sweat or paleness

**What to do if you are experiencing these symptoms:
CONTACT YOUR PHYSICIAN.**

Brought to you by Erie County Department of Health and Employee Wellness

