



California Area Indian Health Service

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Inside this issue:

Area Director's Message	1
Do You Suffer From Seasonal Allergies?	1
Healthy Hearts	2
Diabetes and Your Oral Health	2
Woman's Health and Mammograms	3
Protect Yourself From Ticks	4
Let Your Voices Be Heard!	4
Important Events	4



Area Director's Message Ms. Margo Kerrigan, MPH



Alcohol & Drug Abuse

Alcohol and drug abuse are the nation's top health problems. The cost and consequences of alcoholism and drug dependence place an enormous burden on American society. Alcohol addiction strains the health care system and the economy, harms family life, and threatens public safety. Substance abuse crosses all societal boundaries, affecting both genders, every ethnic group, and people in every tax bracket.

A new study from the Substance Abuse and Mental

Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) shows American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to have higher rates of alcohol use and illicit drug use disorders than other racial groups. The complete report is available online at: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is the leading known, and preventable, cause of mental retardation. Heavy drinking during pregnancy can cause significant birth defects. Rates of FAS are higher among American Indians and Alaska Natives than the general population. Studies

have found alcohol consumption rates among AI/AN women of childbearing age to be higher than average. Screening with intervention has been shown to be effective in reducing alcohol misuse in pregnancy and to reduce the incidence of FAS.

Like other diseases, addiction can be overcome with proper treatment, prevention and more research. Americans increasingly recognize that alcoholism and drug dependence is a disease with consequences that affect both physical and behavioral health.

(continued on page 3)

Do You Suffer From Seasonal Allergies? By Christine Brennan, MPH

Do you suffer from runny nose, itchy or tearing eyes, bouts of sneezing, or hives during certain times of the year? If so, you may be suffering from seasonal allergies. Seasonal allergies are most common in the Spring or Fall when certain trees or plants pollinate. Many people often mistake their symptoms for a cold and do not seek treatment from their doctor. If your symptoms occur all at once (instead of gradually), last longer than 7 to 10 days, and often occur in Spring or Fall, your symptoms may be due to allergies rather than a cold.

An allergy is an overreaction of the immune system to normally harmless substances. In people with seasonal allergies, their body responds to substances such as pollen and molds by attacking them the same way they would attack an infectious agent, such as a cold virus that enters the body. The body's response to these allergens is responsible for the symptoms allergy sufferers experience.

There are steps you can take to reduce your exposure to pollens to prevent or minimize your seasonal allergies:

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days, especially if the weather forecast indicates a high pollen count
- Keep pets off of furniture, pollen can stick to their fur and transfer to furniture
- Don't hang laundry outside to dry
- On days with high pollen counts, keep windows and doors closed and run your air conditioner instead
- Use a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter in your home to filter allergens from the air
- Vacuum carpets weekly or replace carpeting with laminate, wood, or tile flooring
- Wash sheets and bedding in water heated to at least 130 degrees
- Encase box springs, mattresses, and pillows in allergy-proof covers



There are many treatment options for seasonal allergies. If you are having symptoms of seasonal allergies, talk to your doctor about the treatment option that may work best for you.

There are many prescription treatments available as well as many over-the-counter remedies and natural remedies that may offer relief.

For more information:

California Department of Public Health: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Allergies.aspx>

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America: <http://www.aafa.org/>

Healthy Hearts By Beverly Calderon, RD, CDE

A better life for the next generation involves focusing your habits and making them healthy. With cardiovascular disease about two times greater in American Indians compared to similar populations in the United States, focusing on you will also help those who follow you. A related risk is obesity, which may threaten the healthy future of one-third of American children. Coronary Heart Disease, atherosclerosis of the coronary arteries, is the condition in which an artery wall thickens as the result of a build-up of fatty materials such as cholesterol. It is a slow progressive disease.

It is time to focus on prevention and take action. This includes focusing on a diet full of colorful fruits and vegetables, low in animal fats and salt and high in fiber. It is also about moving and working with your provider and trained fitness specialist if you have current health conditions. Whatever age you are now, you did not reach it quickly. So whatever nutrition and physical exercise goals you have, you don't need to try to reach them quickly. Steadily working toward them and keeping track along the way is a key to success and improved health.

What can a healthy diet and regular exercise give you?

- Reduced body fat, especially abdominal fat that is so harmful to the heart
- Reduced blood pressure
- Improved blood cholesterol levels
- Reduced inflammation (a key factor in causing plaque rupture)
- Enhanced insulin sensitivity, improving blood sugar levels and decreasing risk for diabetes (which is a very major risk for heart disease)
- Decreased risk of blood clots by enhancing fibrinolysis (preventing or dissolving unwanted clots)
- Improved endothelial functioning of the blood vessels work to keep the arteries healthy and functioning properly



Diabetes and Your Oral Health By Steve Riggio, DDS

Diabetes affects nearly 16 million Americans and nearly 800,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. American Indians suffer from diabetes at a greater rate than the general population. Diabetes can cause problems with your eyes, nerves, kidneys, heart, as well as oral health problems.

If there have been any changes in your medical history and especially if you have been diagnosed with diabetes, let your dentist know. Your dentist may request a test of blood sugar to see if your diabetes is under control and may prescribe antibiotics to minimize your risk of infection during dental treatment. It is important to bring the names of all your prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs to your dental visit because some drugs used in dental treatment may have an impact on controlling your diabetes. Individuals with diabetes have a lower resistance to infections and diabetes slows the healing process. In addition,

dental procedures may create the potential for delayed healing and will require a change in diet or medications.

The most common oral health problems associated with diabetes are:

- **Tooth Decay** – Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to high glucose levels in the saliva which may allow decay causing bacteria to thrive
- **Periodontal Disease** – This is an infection of the gums and bones that support the teeth. Diabetes reduces the body's ability to resist this infection
- **Salivary Gland Dysfunction** – Diabetic patients may experience a dry mouth (lack of adequate saliva). Constant dry mouth can lead to inflamed and painful soft tissues, as well as an increased risk for tooth decay
- **Fungal Infections** – A reduced amount of saliva and high salivary

glucose levels can lead to an increase in fungal infections (thrush)

- **Infections** – Infections make it more difficult to control blood glucose levels. It may be necessary for your dentist to prescribe antibiotics if you are having extensive oral surgery procedures

If you have been diagnosed with diabetes it is important to practice good oral hygiene at home (brush and floss), follow your physicians dietary and medication instructions, and schedule regular dental check-ups.



Tender and swollen gum

Alcohol & Drug Abuse *(continued from page 1)*

The evidence demonstrates that treatment for alcohol and other drug abuse works. Alcoholism and drug dependence are treatable and millions of people achieve recovery.

If you suspect that you might have a drinking problem, or you know someone who abuses alcohol, please contact SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at 1-800-729-6686 or find a screening site located near you. They also offer a list of free publications that will provide you with additional information about the hazards of drinking alcohol.

Alcoholism and drug dependence are treatable

The following American Indian/Alaska Native Resource Links are a variety of organizations and resources available to parents, caregivers, providers, and other individuals interested in obtaining additional information on alcohol and drug related issues including FAS in American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

- Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP) - <http://www.aaip.com>
- National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research - http://aianp.uchsc.edu/ncaianmhr/ncaianmhr_index.htm
- One Sky Center - <http://www.oneskycenter.org/>

Warning Signs of Alcohol Abuse

If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, you may have a problem with alcohol:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after drinking?

Woman's Health and Mammograms By Dawn M. Phillips, RN, CDE

Screening:

There has been much controversy about women and at what age to receive your first screening mammogram. In 2009, new guidelines were published by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force which stated if you are a woman ages 40 – 49, you should talk to your doctors about the risk and benefits of having a mammogram (CNN Health). Both the American Cancer Society and U.S. Preventive Services Task Force agree that early diagnosis and treatment is still the best protection against breast cancer.

Statistics:

In the U.S., breast cancer is the most common cancer found in women. According to CNN Health, nearly 200,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year. There are prevention activities that you can practice to decrease the risk of developing breast cancer. The foods that we eat play a role in decreasing cancer and some foods can inhibit cancer cell growth. The National

Cancer Institute believes that nearly one-third of all cancer deaths may be diet related (March 2010).

Prevention:

Here are some foods that actually have a chemical component that blocks the intestinal absorption of certain fats or have powerful antioxidants that are known to prevent cancer: Avocados, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, chili peppers, red grapes, grapefruit, garlic, nuts, oranges, raspberries, papayas, rosemary, sweet potatoes, green and black tea, and tomatoes (CNN Health). Try to include these foods into your diet every day and eat a variety of foods. Also, obtain fats by using vegetable oils instead of saturated fats found in animals.



Another prevention activity associated with a lower risk of developing breast cancer is maintain a normal weight. Women who are obese or with a body mass index (BMI) of 32, are three times more likely to have higher-stage breast cancers (Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention, June 2003). Daily exercise decreases the risk of developing breast cancer and experts agree that women who exercise 5 days a week for 45 – 60 minutes actually lessen the risk of breast cancer (American Cancer Society).

The message for women:

If you are a woman with no family history of breast cancer and between the ages of 40-49 years then you may be able to delay mammogram screening until age 50. Talk to your doctor about when you should have your first screening mammogram and make an informed decision. Practice eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables; maintain a healthy weight; and move (exercise) on most days.

Protect Yourself From Ticks By Lisa Nakagawa, MPH

Lyme Disease



Lyme Disease rash

In California, the western blacklegged tick transmits the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. The western black-legged tick has been

found in 56 of the 58 counties in California, but is most commonly found in the humid coastal areas and on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada range. People get Lyme disease from the bite of infected tick. Symptoms usually include fever, headache, fatigue, and a skin rash. Lyme disease can successfully be treated with antibiotics, especially in the early stage. If untreated, infection can spread to joints, the heart, and the nervous system.

Prevention:

- Avoid Areas With Ticks - Ticks prefer wooded and bushy areas with high grass and a lot of leaf litter
- Keep Ticks Off Your Skin - Use insect repellent with 20% - 30% DEET on exposed skin and clothing to prevent tick bites. Also wear long pants, long sleeves, and long socks to keep ticks off your skin
- Check Skin and Clothes for Ticks - Perform daily tick checks after being outdoors

Tick Removal:

- Use fine-tipped tweezers to firmly grasp the tick very close to your skin
- With a steady motion, pull the tick's body away from your skin. Avoid crushing the tick's body

- Clean your hands and infected area with soap and warm water
- Apply an antiseptic to the bite site
- Throw the dead tick away with your household trash
- If you accidentally crush the tick, clean your skin with soap and warm water or alcohol.

For more information visit:

DO NOT use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish, or other products to remove a tick

California Department of Public Health: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HEALTHINFO/DISCOND/Pages/LymeDisease.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/Lyme/index.htm>

Let Your Voices Be Heard! By Helen Maldonado, PA-C, CDE



Are you being heard by your health care provider, diabetes educator, health board representative or health clinic? As a member of a community that is American Indian/Alaska Native, you hold the power for directing your personal health care and the health and well-being of your entire community. If you don't feel your needs are being heard, here are some ways you may want to ask your health program to provide:

- Newsletters with information on health issues
- Surveys to ask how you feel about your healthcare

- Direct access to staff by phone, email, or face-to-face
- Annual potlucks in your community
- Continuous efforts to improve communication between the community and health care program

It is smart for community members to be able to tell their health program what they would like to see develop in their clinic. Do you want to be included in deciding what direction the health program is taking? Do you have some great ideas to make health programs run more smoothly? Of course your medical information and other community members' must remain confidential, but you are welcome to talk about the way things are done. Do you have to wait a long time in the waiting room before you are seen? Does it take weeks to get in to see a doctor for a routine or chronic problem?

Health programs can be improved, but

first there has to be conversations between the community and the health program. You need to remain positive and brainstorm, working as a team toward new possibilities. Remember, the lives of you and your relations rely on your voices.

Important Events

Wellness Forum (May 25-27)

Hosted by: Indian Health Service/ California Area Office and California Rural Indian Health Board

Location: Monterey, CA

This Wellness Forum aims to enhance and strengthen local efforts focused in the areas of prevention. The event provides education and networking opportunities. Target audience includes PHNs, CHRs, Dietitians/Nutritionists, Outreach Staff, Behavioral Health Staff, Health Education Staff, and Community Champions.

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