

Public Health Notes

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NH DHHS Mission Statement: To join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence.

American Heart Month and Go Red for Women

February is American Heart Month and has been celebrated since 1963 to raise awareness about heart disease and how to prevent it. February 5th this year is National Wear Red Day, a day to help raise awareness that heart disease is the #1 killer of women in the U.S. Make a New Year's resolution to improve your heart health and talk with your doctor.

Do you know the importance of having your **blood**



Important Dates

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month

National Cervical Cancer Coalition

www.nccc-online.org

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

www.marchofdimes.com

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

January 3-9 is National Folic Acid Awareness Week

National Council on Folic Acid

www.folicacidinfo.org

February is American Heart Month

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

February is National Cancer Prevention Month

American Institute for Cancer Research

www.aicr.org

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

February is National Children's Dental Health Month

American Dental Association

www.ada.org

February 5 is National Wear Red Day

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

www.hearttruth.gov

American Heart Association National Center

www.goredforwomen.org

February 23–March 1 is National Eating Disorders Awareness Week

National Eating Disorders Association

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org



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pressure checked? Recommended blood pressure is 120/80 or less for healthy people, 140/90 or less if you have a health condition and are monitored by a doctor. High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease. For more information talk to your doctor and visit www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/.

Having a high level of **cholesterol** in your blood can put you at risk of developing heart disease. Cholesterol can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. For more information talk with your doctor and visit www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/.



It is important to eat a **healthy diet** that is varied and includes

lots of fruits and vegetables and whole grains, but is low in salt, saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, added sugars, and refined grains.

Exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle and adults 18–64 are recommended to get at least 2 1/2 hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity every week and do muscle-strengthening activities at least twice a week. To read more, go to www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adults/index.htm.

Smoking and tobacco use are big risk factors for heart disease as well as stroke. If you smoke, consider quitting for the New Year. Call the NH Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visiting www.TryToStopNH.org.

Make 2016 a healthier year and lower your risk of heart disease. Calculate your heart age based on certain health indicators to see if it matches your chronological age at www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heartage/index.html. Consider taking a CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) class because a heart attack could happen to someone you know. For more information on heart health, visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdpc/hdsp.htm, www.heart.org, or www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/.

Increase in Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the United States

The annual report on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows increases in chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis cases for the first time since 2006. There were approximately 1.4 million cases of chlamydia in 2014 in the U.S., which is an increase of 2.8% over 2013. Rates for primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis (the most infectious stages) and gonorrhea were both up since 2013 by 15.1% and 5.1%, respectively.

STDs continue to affect young people—particularly women—most severely, but increasing rates among men contributed to the overall increases in 2014 across all three diseases.

P&S syphilis among men who have sex with men (MSM) has been increasing since at least 2000. In 2014, rates of P&S syphilis increased among MSM, who account for 83% of reported cases among men when the sex of the partner is known. Also concerning is that more than half of MSM (51%) diagnosed with syphilis in 2014 were also HIV positive (infected with

the virus that causes AIDS). Infection with syphilis can cause sores on the genitals, which make it easier to transmit and acquire HIV.

Syphilis is currently the only STD for which information on the sex of the sexual partner is reported. However, a growing body of evidence indicates that MSM are experiencing similar rates of gonorrhea and chlamydia infections, which underscores the need to further understand what is contributing to the increase.

The 2014 data also show that youth are still



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at the highest risk of acquiring an STD, especially chlamydia and gonorrhea. Despite being a relatively small portion of the sexually active population, young people between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea in 2014 and almost two-thirds of all reported cases. Additionally, previous estimates suggest that young people in this age group acquire half of the estimated 20 million new STDs diagnosed each year. Despite recommendations from the CDC and the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) for annual chlamydia and gonorrhea screening for sexually active women younger than 25, experts believe far too many young people are not tested, and therefore don't know they are infected.

Winter Safety



We are all hardy New Englanders, and winter comes the same time every year, but sometimes we are still unprepared. Here are some important steps you and your loved ones can take to help keep you safe and healthy through the cold and snow this winter.

Your Home

Carbon monoxide is a real danger in the home. It is a colorless, odorless gas that results from incompletely burned fossil fuels, i.e., wood, oil, propane, and coal. Carbon monoxide can be deadly, first causing drowsiness, confusion, headache, and weakness that may progress to nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and loss of consciousness. People who are asleep or intoxicated

can die from CO poisoning before they ever even experience symptoms.

Weather and Travel

It is easy to underestimate the effects of cold weather when you are outside or traveling. A broken down car can leave you stranded with no source of heat, for example, so always dress appropriately and have an emergency kit in your car with a flashlight and batteries,



food that lasts, such as granola bars, water, jumper cables, a blanket, radio, cat litter or sand (to add traction in slippery conditions), an ice scraper, shovel, cell phone with charger if you have one, and flares. Also consider pet food if you are traveling with a pet and extra diapers and baby food if you have a young child.

Some other tips are to keep your gas tank at least half full to help prevent ice in the lines and in case a storm comes that knocks out the power, since gas station pumps require electricity. Also, check the tread on your tires to make sure they are sufficient for the conditions.

Your Health

Cold can cause serious problems and lead to hypothermia and frostbite if it persists too long. Read more about cold weather injuries at www.cdc.gov/features/workingincold/. Always dress for the weather; if it is very cold, wear layers, including a hat, gloves, and waterproof boots if you're going to be spending time outdoors.

Accidents are also a big concern in the winter.

Before using a chain saw or snow blower, be sure to read the instructions on how to use them properly and follow all safety guidelines.

To read more about winter preparedness, visit www.cdc.gov/features/winterweather/ or www.ready.gov.

New Year's Health Resolutions

It is the time of year for New Year's resolutions and people most often make them about improving their health—losing weight, exercising more, and quitting smoking are examples. It is important to remember that not everything works for everybody; people are different.

For losing weight and exercising more, studies have shown that people do better if they set smaller milestones, such as adding more walking for a week, then also taking the stairs more the second week, and adding giving up soda the third week, and so on. Remember that any improvement is a step in the right direction, and it can take several weeks for a change to become habit. Studies say it takes at least two weeks for something to truly become a new habit, so be patient.

If you are looking to improve your diet, try eating a vegetable with every meal or eliminating one sugary treat per day to start. Then gradually make other changes, such as switching to non-sugary drinks or giving up cream in your coffee to cut calories. The little things start to add up if you stick with them. That is the key—make changes that you can stick with. But give yourself permission to have a bad day once in a while. The important thing is to find out what works

for you and your life.

If you need to quit tobacco, try getting help. The DHHS Division of Public Health Services is offering free nicotine replacement therapy, in the form of the patch, to New Hampshire residents who want to quit smoking or chewing tobacco in the New Year. Two good resources to help people quit are www.TryToStopNH.org and 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669), where any New Hampshire resident can get free advice, counseling, support, and while supplies last.

Vaccines for Pregnant Women

We have all been conditioned to use great caution in eating and taking medications while pregnant, but many people may not realize that some vaccines are important for keeping women and their babies healthy. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the specific vaccinations you need are determined by factors such as your age, lifestyle, medical conditions you may have, such as asthma or diabetes, type and locations of travel, and previous vaccinations. View the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's document [Immunization and Pregnancy](#) to learn which ones you need before, during, and after pregnancy.

If you are planning to become pregnant, make sure your immunizations are up to date beforehand. Learn more by viewing the CDC's [Recommended Immunization Schedule for Adults](#). Or take the [vaccine quiz](#) and be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about what vaccines are right for you. To learn more, visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/pregnant.html and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Immunization Program website at www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/index.htm.

Happy New Year!



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January is Radon Action Month. To Keep Your Home Healthy—Test. Fix. Save a Life.

Radon is an invisible, odorless and colorless gas that is emitted by soil and rock and can seep into indoor spaces through gaps in the foundation, construction joints, and cracks in floors and walls. Well water can also serve as a source for radon.

According to the EPA, your radon exposure risk will depend on:

- The levels of radon in your home, school, or work space
- The amount of time you spend in those environments
- Whether you have a deep dug well sunk into rocks with a high radium concentration
- Whether or not you are a smoker; and
- Since radon levels are highest in rooms close to the ground, whether you spend a lot of time in basement rooms.

In January, New Hampshire Healthy Homes encourages everyone to get their homes tested for radon. This is a simple way to protect you and your loved ones' health. There are a number of resources for test kits:

- Do-it-yourself test kits for radon run between \$20 and \$30 and can be purchased online and at your local hardware store.
- If you'd like a certified technician to measure the radon levels in your home or other indoor environment, go to the National Radon Proficiency Program website to ensure that you

hire a qualified technician: www.nrpp.info.

If your home has elevated radon levels, it's important to find a qualified radon service professional to fix your home immediately. The cost will vary, but average cost is around \$1,200.

Once your home's radon issues have been fixed, you should re-test your home every two years. It's a good idea to re-test your home regularly even if your levels were not elevated to begin with to be sure the levels remain low.

To learn more visit the New Hampshire Environmental Tracking Program at www.nh.gov/epht/, the New Hampshire Healthy Homes & Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dphs/bchs/clpp/documents/hhbrochure.pdf, the Environmental Protection Agency at www.epa.gov/radon, and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services at www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/air/pehb/ehs/radon/categories/resources.htm.



The National Radon Action Plan

A STRATEGY
for SAVING LIVES

JANUARY IS NATIONAL RADON ACTION MONTH

Test Your Home. Protect Your Health.