

YOUR PUBLIC HEALTH

2003 Annual Report Highlights



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH



Did You Know?

- Prenatal health fairs are held 3 times per year with over 1,800 participants attending in 2003.
- Approximately 142,000 Region of Waterloo residents were vaccinated against Influenza in 2003/04.
- 30,499 school children in Waterloo Region were screened for urgent and preventive dental needs.
- Our Resource Centre has over 6,000 resources that Waterloo Region residents can borrow.
- We followed up with 100% of foodborne illnesses within 24 hours of getting a report.
- To help prevent the spread of West Nile virus by mosquitoes, 27,000 catch basins and 8 temporary standing water sites throughout the region had larvicide applied.
- In addition to 28 presentations, workshops, health fairs and contests, more than 11,000 physical activity resources were given out in the region.
- Our Regional ambulance service operates 20 vehicles from 7 stations.
- Together with 25 partner agencies we screened 248 children under the age of six (from 200 families) for development, vision, speech and dental problems at five Child Health Fairs held across Waterloo Region.
- We responded to 7,027 calls to the Healthy Children Information Line.
- 137 health care professionals were trained in the use of a screening protocol to assess past and present abuse of females over age 12.
- The Growing Food and the Economy study found that agriculture in Waterloo Region results in \$2.7 billion in sales and 26,000 jobs.
- We initiated 27 studies and completed 14 others to evaluate our programs and plan future services.
- We conducted a Rural Health Study and talked to over 250 rural residents about the things they felt affected their health.

Growing Healthy Two-gether Program

Helping pregnant women to stay healthy can reduce the number of low birth weight babies. To assist, the Growing Healthy Two-gether Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program provides free:

- prenatal and breastfeeding information
- preparation for parenting
- food and grocery certificates
- community resource referrals
- child care
- bus tickets

In 2003 this program was delivered to 424 women at five locations in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. Of the 120 women that attended the program every week:

- 30% were under 20 years of age
- 40% were born outside of Canada
- 27% spoke a language other than English at home

Participants reported that the program made a difference in their life. Most important was the social or peer support followed by health information, food and grocery gift certificates.

SARS - Tackling the Unknown

In February 2003, SARS arrived in Toronto on a flight from Hong Kong. Its transmission in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) hospitals resulted in the first-ever declared health emergency in Ontario. In the 4 months before the Ontario outbreak was declared:

- at least 375 persons were infected
- 44 deaths occurred
- thousands had been quarantined

After a Ministry of Health alert mid-March 2003, Region of Waterloo Public Health staff notified local health care providers and met with hospitals, community clinics, emergency responders and the Region's Emergency Control Group to plan strategies if the disease spread. High priority information was communicated through:

- Regular faxes and daily emails to health care providers
- A public information phone line
- After-hours education sessions for health care providers

As the outbreak continued, staff investigated at least 75 reports of possible SARS illness in area

residents. They also supervised the quarantine of people who had been in GTA hospitals or other sites where SARS cases had been identified.

In the end, the Region had no confirmed cases of SARS. Lessons learned during this emergency continue to challenge the health care system and highlight the need for ongoing preparedness for future outbreaks.

Resource Centre

Anyone who lives, works or goes to school in Waterloo Region may borrow resources from the Public Health Resource Centre. Rural township residents may borrow resources through their local library (<http://www.rwl.library.on.ca/index.html>).

There are over 6,000 teaching kits, books, videos, and posters available. Popular topics include:

- nutrition and healthy eating
- food safety
- prenatal, child and youth health
- parenting

- cancer prevention
- dental health
- Sexually Transmitted Disease prevention
- community development

The Resource Centre's catalogue can be searched at the Public Health website:

<http://www.region.waterloo.on.ca/ph> choose **Resources** then **Resource Centre**.

In 2003, the Resource Centre staff:

- lent 4,727 teaching kits, books, videos and posters
- responded to 4,752 requests for information about resources
- distributed 135,784 pamphlets on various health promotion themes



Message from the Medical Officer of Health:

In 2003 Public Health continued to work towards our goal of building healthy and supportive communities. We achieve this goal by protecting the health of the community, promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing and minimizing risks to health, increasing our community's capacity to deal with conditions that affect their health, and by providing timely and appropriate ambulance services.

In 2003 we focused on reaching more citizens in our community. For example, our early child development, communicable disease and immunization activities reached many immigrant newcomer families, and we continued to support Opportunities 2000 - a poverty reduction initiative. We are also serving a growing and aging community and have been expanding services to meet increased demand. For example, in Emergency Medical Services we continue to respond to more emergency calls each year.

In order to see the progress of our efforts, we made a commitment to enhance our monitoring of the

health of our community. One of our new initiatives included the production of the Healthy Communities Report-a snapshot of the health of Waterloo Region. We also joined 22 other health units in Ontario in the on-going collection of health behaviour information through the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System.

2003 was also a year in which we faced SARS, highlighting the fact that new and emerging diseases have become an important priority in Public Health. West Nile virus is also a relatively new disease in North America, one which we are still learning about. These emerging diseases have challenged public health to evaluate its role in the prevention of, and preparedness for, new diseases as we move into the future. We have risen to these challenges in collaboration with local health care and municipal partners. At this time the public health system is under review at the federal and provincial level and we anticipate a refocusing of the public health system as a result of these reviews in the future.

Liana Nolan,
Commissioner/Medical Officer of Health

Together 4 Health

Waterloo Region's Together 4 Health coalition works on preventing chronic diseases such as: cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some forms of cancer. The 2003 activities include:

- Developing a Healthy Schools Toolkit. Schools use the kit to help make healthy eating and physical activity easier choices for children.
- Launching the website: www.together4health.ca that includes tips for living healthy, calendar of events, library of resources and links to other health related websites.
- Handing out the Healthy Lifestyles Resource Guide at a Workplace Wellness Expo. The guide lists Waterloo Region services and resources that support employees' healthy lifestyle needs.

Take Time Out * Get Active * Eat for Health * Live Smoke-Free

Tobacco Control

Selling tobacco to youth under 19 years of age is against the law. In 2003, a total of 297 tobacco vendors were checked using a Youth Test Shopper. Almost all (98%) of Waterloo Region tobacco vendors obeyed the Tobacco Control Act (TCA) by not selling tobacco to these youth. However, 7 vendors did sell to the Tobacco Youth Test Shoppers. Public Health Inspectors issued warning letters to 6 of the vendors. Two charges were issued, both to the same vendor. This vendor pled guilty, and the charge against the clerk was removed.



In addition, 85 students and several members of the public were observed smoking on school property. Warnings were issued to most individuals, and 2 students were charged with smoking on school property based on the "three strikes policy".

Emergency Medical Services

Our Regional ambulance service answered 44,150 calls in 2003. Of these calls:

- 59% were emergency calls
- 38% were "standby calls" when another ambulance is busy in local or neighbouring areas
- 3% involved transferring a patient between facilities

In 2003, emergency calls increased 13.1% over calls in 2002. Ninety percent were reached in 12 minutes, 59 seconds or less. Almost 66% of emergency calls were reached within the 9-minute Emergency Response Time target set by Regional Council.



Emergency Medical Services (EMS) welcomed 15 new paramedics in 2003. Of the service's 116 paramedics, 66 were Primary Care Paramedics and 50 had the additional training and skills required of Advanced Care Paramedics. Advanced Care Paramedics responded to 98.8% of all Cardiac Arrest calls in 2003.

Other changes that helped EMS to better serve the Region in 2003 included:

- Relocating the Waterloo EMS station
- Building a new station in St. Jacobs
- Adding almost 13,000 hours of new ambulance coverage

Bullying Awareness Project Update

In May 2003, Region of Waterloo Public Health and local school boards celebrated their three year partnership in bullying prevention. Five hundred children from grades 3, 4 & 5, at four schools piloting the project, completed the final survey that revealed these highlights:

- 5% fewer students experienced bullying (2000: 54%; 2003: 49%)
- 9% more students felt compassion towards bullied students (2000: 66%; 2003: 75%)
- 15% fewer students observed bullying but chose not to intervene (2000: 35%, 2003: 21%)

In September 2003, the project was offered to eight new Elementary schools (with approximately 2,250 students). The schools also sent 52 people to two days of training in order to design bullying prevention work plans. The manual "Imagine... A School without Bullying, A School Climate Approach", developed by Public Health and the school boards, was also distributed to schools in Waterloo Region in 2003.



Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program Update

New babies are screened and can have a home visit by a public health nurse. These are free and voluntary services of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children program. The program gives support and information on making healthy choices to pregnant mothers and families with children up to age six.

A provincial study found children receiving home visiting had higher development of:

- Social skills
- Language skills
- Motor skills such as crawling, grasping small objects, pulling self up to standing position

Parents were found to:

- Be more connected to community services and support
- Have more confidence in their parenting skills



Parents can use a screening tool, called the Nipissing Developmental Screen, to help identify concerns with their child's development. In 2003 this tool was distributed to families and organizations working with families in Waterloo Region. Health care providers were also encouraged to check children's growth and development at 18 months of age.

Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System

Have you been one of 100 randomly selected adults (aged 18 and over) surveyed by RRFSS this month? RRFSS is the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System. This monthly telephone survey is administered by the Institute for Social Research (ISR), at York University for Public Health. Starting September 2003, Region of Waterloo Public Health became one of 23 public health units across Ontario to participate in this survey.

The flexibility of RRFSS allows the Region of Waterloo Public Health to determine what information we wish

to collect. RRFSS provides health units with current, local health information on various health behaviours and risk factors, such as smoking and immunization.

This information supports our planning and evaluation, policy development, and improves community awareness.

Citizen and Community Engagement

Public Health assists citizens and community groups in improving the health of their communities. In 2003 we:

- Helped groups develop leadership skills to use in their communities. We linked again with Wilfrid Laurier University to offer Reaching In. This eight-week course discussed how to get people involved in community projects, gather information, plan strategy, make presentations and mediate conflicts.

- Trained 12 Community Nutrition Workers (CNW) and 16 Peer Health Workers (PHW) to work with residents of their communities at 17 community sites. CNWs planned and ran programs on how to get and make nutritious food. PHWs supported healthy parenting.

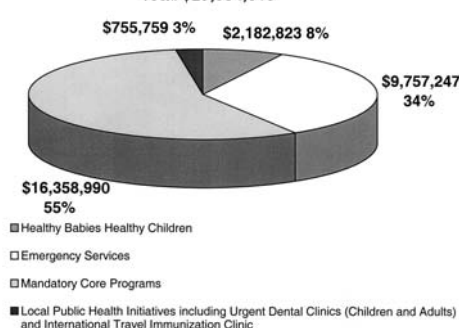
- Worked with FoodLink to produce the 2nd edition of the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! map, featuring farms that sell locally. We helped FoodLink become a non-profit organization that promotes local farming and markets for local farmers.



Public Health Budget 2003

2003 Expenditures

Total \$29,054,819



2003 Revenue

Total \$29,054,819

