NEWS RELEASE
Managing Your Child’s Asthma

Asthma is one of the most common health problems in New York State and the nation, especially among inner-city and preschool-aged children. Recently, the number of people with asthma has grown at such a rapid rate that it is called an epidemic.

“In New York State, asthma now affects more than 1.1 million adults and more than a quarter-million children,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). “It is the fourth leading cause of disability among children under 18.”

“Parents need to know about this long-lasting lung condition,” (name of official) said. “It’s especially important to learn how to prevent and manage asthma attacks.”

At certain times, asthma makes it hard to breathe. If your child has asthma, his or her airways get sore, swollen and very sensitive. They react strongly to things that your child is allergic to or finds irritating. When this happens less air goes into the lungs. An asthma attack is when someone with asthma wheezes (makes a whistling sound when breathing), coughs, has a tight chest, and has trouble breathing, especially at night and early morning.

“Asthma can’t be cured, but these attacks can be managed, allowing kids with asthma to lead active lives,” (name of official) said.

If your child has asthma, it is very important that you see a doctor to develop and stick to an asthma action plan for your child. This may include taking medicine.

It is also important that you do not smoke. Smoking will make your child’s asthma worse. Help your child avoid contact with things that might cause an asthma attack such as tobacco smoke, cockroaches, dust, dust mites, pets, mold, and some chemicals. These
items are called ‘triggers’ because they may start an attack. Triggers vary from person to person.

Even babies can have asthma. If your family has a history of allergies and/or asthma, your baby may be more likely to develop asthma. It may first show up as several days of wheezing after a cold, or a tight-sounding cough at night. If you notice your baby has wheezing, coughing, trouble breathing, or shortness of breath, take him or her to a doctor to be checked.

Sometimes you will need to see the doctor more than once to make sure that the wheezing is caused by asthma and not by congestion from a cold. If your doctor says your child has asthma, he or she will probably give you medicine to help keep your baby’s airways open. Usually you are also told to reduce possible sources of allergies in your baby’s environment. Some ways to do this are to get rid of items that collect dust and keep pets out of your baby’s room.

When your child has asthma, it’s important to have a regular pediatrician who can follow your child’s progress and see how he or she reacts to different treatments.

For more information on living with asthma, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/asthma. The web site also includes information about health insurance for you and your child.
NEWS RELEASE
April is Autism Awareness Month

As we observe April as Autism Awareness Month, all parents should learn the signs of autism and act early if they are concerned about how their child learns, plays speaks or acts. Autism can range from being mild to severe. Signs of autism can be seen before age 3 and last through a person’s life.

“About 1 in 110 American children has autism. Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism. A person with autism may talk, interact, behave, and learn in different ways.” said (name and title of official) of the (local health agency name).

While we do not know all of the causes of autism, we know that early detection of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) followed by the right interventions can lead to better outcomes for children affected by autism.

ASDs are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. There are three different types of ASDs:

- **Autistic Disorder** - Children with autistic disorder usually have significant language delays, social and communication challenges, and unusual behaviors and interests.

- **Asperger Syndrome** - Children might have social challenges and unusual behaviors and interests.

- **Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)** - Children who meet some of the criteria for autistic disorder or Asperger syndrome, but not all. People with PDD-NOS usually have fewer and milder symptoms than those with autistic disorder.
Some children with an ASD show hints of future problems within the first few months of life. In others, symptoms might not show up until 24 months or later. Some children with an ASD seem to develop normally until around 18 to 24 months of age and then they stop gaining new skills, or they lose the skills they once had.

Children with an ASD might not respond to their name (12 months), show interest (14 months) or play "pretend" games (18 months). They may have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look, or feel; flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles; or, repeat words or phrases over and over. Other children may get upset by minor changes; have trouble understanding other people's feelings, or talking about their own feelings; or avoid eye contact and want to be alone. It is important to talk to your child’s doctor as soon as possible if you think your child has an ASD or other developmental problem.

Early Intervention Services help children from birth to three years old learn important skills and provide therapy services to help the child talk, walk, and interact with others. Family education and counseling, home visits and parent support groups are also available to families of infants and toddlers with disabilities. Early Intervention Programs are located in every New York State county and New York City.

For more information on Early Intervention Services, call New York State “Growing Up Healthy” 24-hour hotline at 1-800-522-5006 or visit the State Health Department’s web site at www.health.ny.gov/community/infants_children/early_intervention/disorders/autism.
NEWS RELEASE
Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. Today, 21 percent of elementary age students in New York State -- and fully 24 percent of those in New York City -- are obese.

Significant causes of childhood obesity are poor nutritional choices and a sedentary lifestyle. Few children eat the recommended five or more daily servings of vegetables and fruits. More than one-third of young people (age 12 to 21) do not engage in regular physical activities.

“Nationally, the percentage of young people who are obese has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Obesity is now the most common nutritional disorder of children and adolescents in the United States,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

A person is defined as overweight if his or her Body Mass Index (BMI) is between 25 and 30, and defined as obese if the BMI is more than 30. (To calculate BMI, divide weight in pounds by the square of the person’s height in inches and multiply by 704.5.)

“Obesity in children potentially shortens life spans, increases the likelihood of chronic disease, and lowers the quality of lives. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a severely obese person – one with a BMI greater than 40 – has more than seven times the risk of diabetes and six times the risk of high blood pressure than a person who maintains a healthy weight,” (name of official) said. “Obesity is also a major contributor to heart disease, arthritis, and asthma,” (he/she) said.
Inactivity and poor nutrition are the key factors leading to the current epidemic of childhood obesity. Healthy food choices and daily physical activity can do much to reverse this growing health problem.

The New York State Health Department recommends increasing daily consumption of vegetables and fruit, and three or more servings of low-fat milk or other low-fat dairy products or other calcium-rich foods every day. Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

“Sixty minutes of physical activity is not hard to fit into the lives of our children. And it’s important for parents to set an example and to buy healthful food for their children. Crispy vegetables, tasty fruits, and low-fat or fat-free yogurt can make healthful snack alternatives to candy and chips. The next time you reach for milk on the store shelf, choose low-fat or fat-free instead of whole milk,” (name of official) said.

To learn more about physical activity and healthy nutrition, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.ny.gov/prevention/obesity.
NEWS RELEASE
Heat, Humidity and Children

With winter days behind us, it’s important to pay attention now to the dangers of excessive temperatures and humidity. Although anyone can suffer from heat-related illnesses, infants and young children are at a greater risk than other people. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics their bodies are more sensitive to the effects of high temperatures because they have more surface area than body weight. This makes children gain heat at a faster rate while their immature sweat glands slow the release. Acclimatization (process of adjusting to the heat and humidity) is a slower process for children.

“Give your child time to adjust to the weather conditions around them. Their bodies need to find a temperature that is right and comfortable. Meanwhile, they need us to keep them safe and prevent heat-related illnesses,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

(He/She) offered advice on how to keep your children safe during the hot and humid days ahead:

**Drink plenty of fluids.** Regardless of your child’s activity level they must stay hydrated. Avoid sugar filled drinks because they cause the body to lose fluid. Avoid very cold drinks to prevent stomach cramps.

**Replace salt and minerals lost when sweating.** Sports beverages will replenish your child’s salt and mineral level.

**Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen.** Children and infants should be dressed in as little clothing as possible. Clothing should be lightweight, light-colored, and loose-fitting. A hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher must be applied often.

**Adjust your schedule.** Plan outdoor activities for the morning or evening hours.
Cool off. Air conditioning is the number one protective factor. If your home is not air conditioned, spend time in public places that are, like the shopping mall or public libraries. Call the (local health agency name) to find heat-relief shelters in your area. Also take cool baths and showers.

Stay Informed. Listen to local news and weather channels during extreme heat conditions. Contact the (local health agency name) for health and safety updates.

Monitor Children Closely. Regulate their environment and apply all of the above tips to protect not only your children, but yourself as well.

“By applying all tips you can protect your child. But in the unfortunate case that they are not protected, it’s important to know how to recognize the illnesses and treat it accordingly. Keep everyone protected so you can enjoy the warm weather ahead,” (name of official) said.

For more information on heat, humidity and children visit the State Health Department’s web site at www.health.ny.gov/publications/1243.
NEWS RELEASE
Communicating with People with Disabilities

People with disabilities are people just like you and me. They work, play and get married. Like everyone else, they live and participate in every community. And like everyone else, they have feelings and rights.

Everyone should be treated with respect and courtesy. Often, others make assumptions or judgments about a person with a disability. When you communicate with a person who has a disability, the first rule is to respect them as a person.

About 50 million Americans have a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 protects people with disabilities and ensures equal access to employment opportunities and public accommodations.

“People who have a disability are often labeled and faced with prejudice. All people deserve respect,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). As children, we are curious and sometimes point to things that are unfamiliar and ask questions. As adults, we teach our children that, despite our differences, people are people and no one should make fun of or ridicule others because they appear different.

Positive language empowers people with disabilities. When writing or speaking to a person with a disability, it is important to focus on the person, not on the disability. Talk directly to the person. Extend common courtesies like shaking hands. Be respectful and polite.

If you believe a person with a disability needs your help, go ahead and offer it. Wait for your offer to be accepted, ask for or listen to instructions, then provide the assistance requested.
Try to avoid outdated words or words that may be inappropriate when talking to or about a person with a disability. Words like ‘normal person’ imply that the person with a disability isn’t normal.

Here are words to avoid:

- **Afflicted** is a negative term suggesting hopelessness.
- **Confined to a wheelchair** - people are not imprisoned in wheelchairs. Individuals use wheelchairs to move about and enable independence.
- **Crippled** implies someone who is pitiful and unable to do anything.
- **Deaf and dumb** and **deaf-mute** are outdated terms once used to describe people who could neither hear nor speak. Many people who are deaf or hard of hearing can speak, and many people with speech impairments can hear.
- **Gimp** once used to refer to someone who walked with a limp, is outdated and derogatory.
- **Poor** describes a lack of money or someone to be pitied.
- **Retard** and **retarded** are unacceptable terms. The term “intellectual disability should be used when appropriate.
- **Spastic** - people should not be labeled because they lack muscle control as a result of physical or neurological impairments.
- **Suffering** - to say that someone suffers from a disability implies that the disability causes constant pain. This is not always true.
- **Unfortunate** implies unlucky or unsuccessful.
- **Victim** - a person affected by an uncontrollable force or person. Individuals with disabilities are not helpless victims.

NEWS RELEASE
Preventing Diabetes

In New York State, the rate of people diagnosed with diabetes has almost tripled over the past 20 years, according to (name and title) of the (local health agency name). Today more 1.8 million New Yorkers suffer from diabetes, of whom more than 760,000 New Yorkers have diabetes but don’t know it yet.

Five million adults New Yorkers are estimated to have pre-diabetes. People with pre-diabetes have blood glucose levels that are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. People with pre-diabetes are 5 to 15 times more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than someone without the condition. Those with pre-diabetes are also at increased risk of developing heart disease, stroke and eye disease.

The New York State Health Department has partnered with the New York State Health Foundation and the New York State YMCA Foundation to implement a statewide diabetes prevention initiative for high-risk New Yorkers with pre-diabetes.

(County name) is one of 10 sites for this initiative, which established a community-based prevention program at (name of YMCA). The program includes a 16-week in-person group session that focuses on diet and physical activity, support for maintaining a lifestyle change, and problem solving plans for regaining weight.

(Name of official) said that the program develops lifestyle goals for each person. By setting lifestyle goals, participants with pre-diabetes can reduce and maintain their weight. Their weight control is obtained and maintained through two and a half hours of physical activity each week.
Community partners such as (name of organization) work with the YMCA to promote the program within (name of county, city, town) to raise awareness among health care providers and patients. In addition, relationships are maintained with local health care providers to encourage diagnosis of pre-diabetes and referral of eligible patients to the program. Patients are also encouraged to talk with their health care provider to determine if they might be eligible to participate.

This program uses a model that is part of the National Diabetes Prevention Program, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative designed to bring evidence-based methods for preventing type 2 diabetes to communities across America.

Research shows that lifestyle changes can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes in people with pre-diabetes. The Diabetes Prevention Program, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, showed that intensive, personalized lifestyle changes could reduce the risk of developing diabetes by 58 percent overall, and 71 percent for adults 60 years of age and older.

The CDC states that if this program was offered to an overweight adult with pre-diabetes at age 50, it would save an average of $434 in medical costs in the first three years. Other cost-savings not included in this estimate include fewer missed work days because of illness and higher on the job productivity.

To learn if you are eligible for this program, call the (name of organization) at (telephone number). To learn more about diabetes, visit the State Health Department Web site at http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/diabetes.
NEWS RELEASE
April is Donate Life Month

Many New Yorkers have already signed the “Organ Donor” space on their driver’s license. April is Donate Life Month, which makes it a perfect time to for those who haven’t yet done so to sign up to be an organ donor.

(Name and title) of the (local health agency name) encourages everyone to become donors.

“Most of us take life largely for granted. We drive our cars, take care of our families, read our books – and rarely give our health a second thought. There are thousands of New Yorkers whose health and quality-of-life could be greatly improved by the modern miracle of organ donation. Organ donation can give the gift of life.” (he/she) said.

About 10,000 New Yorkers are on waiting lists. As the need for organ donations far exceeds the supply. One person who donates organs (hearts, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas and intestines) can save up to eight lives. A tissue donor (corneas, bone, skin, heart valves, tendons, veins, etc.) can improve 12 or more lives by restoring eyesight, helping fight infections in burn patients, and by preventing the loss of mobility and disability.

New York State has long been a leader in medicine and in organ donation. In 2006, a new law created the Donate Life Registry, a registry that records a person's own legal consent to organ, tissue and eye donation upon his or her death.
The prior ‘Life - Pass It On’ Registry was created in 1999, and records someone's wish to be an organ and tissue donor. If you are signed up in the new registry, your family will be informed of your decision and given information about the donation process - but their consent is not required to proceed with donation.

A single donation can often be used to benefit more than one patient in need. But each year more donors are needed to meet these needs. Signing a donor card is a good first step, but it’s just as important for you to talk to your loved ones and let them know of your donation wishes.

“Some people still have some reservations about the idea of organ donation. And no one wants to think too much about their own mortality. But eye, tissue and organ donation has been found to be consistent with the beliefs and attitudes of all of the world’s major religions,” said (name of official).

“Almost anyone can be an organ donor. So don’t rule yourself out. Be sure to sign your donor card today,” (he/she) said.

For more information about organ donation, visit the New York State Health Department’s website at health.ny.gov/professionals/patients/donation/organ/ or visit the US Department of Health and Human Services page at organdonor.gov/index.html.
Almost everyone is aware of the dangers of drinking and driving. However, not everybody may be aware that driving while drowsy can be equally dangerous. Fortunately, by taking the proper steps, drowsy driving can easily be avoided.

Drowsy driving is classified as either falling asleep when driving or not paying attention to the road or traffic around you. (Name and title) of the (local health agency name) warns that drowsy driving can result from lack of sleep or severe fatigue. It can be just as dangerous as driving drunk, because falling asleep even for a few seconds can result in serious injury or death to you or someone else.

Although drowsy driving can lead to serious injuries or even death, there are ways to avoid it completely. (Name of official) recommends either pulling over and taking a brief nap, or, if possible, switching to another licensed driver if you start experiencing signs of sleepiness. The warning signs of drowsy driving include, but are not limited to, inability to stop yawning, difficulty keeping your eyes open, inability to recall the last few miles driven, and daydreaming or disconnected thinking. Other signs can include sloppy driving, such as weaving between lanes, missing traffic signs, or driving on the rumble strips on the shoulder of the road.

Many of us can become fatigued as the workday progresses. Those who fall into this category should consider other alternatives before attempting to drive home while fatigued. If possible, carpool with someone who lives in your neighborhood. Or, use public transportation if available. If these options are not viable, call a family member to pick you up, or if you must drive, at least take a short nap before starting out.
“Shift workers are at high risk for drowsy driving because they typically get less sleep and keep longer hours than traditional workers,” (name of official) said. Also, our bodies are governed by internal clocks, making it harder for people who work at night to sleep during the day.

It is a common misperception that turning up the radio, singing, eating, or opening up the window will prevent you from falling asleep behind the wheel. However, the reality is that none of these activities will keep you awake when driving.

“If you must drive while fatigued, try following up a cup of coffee or two with a short nap,” (name of official) said. “Sleeping will allow the caffeine to take effect, making you more alert for your trip home. However, if you consume caffeine regularly, this strategy may not work out for you,” (he/she) said.

Becoming a new parent can significantly increase the likelihood of drowsy driving. Getting enough sleep can often seem an impossibility when bringing a newborn home. However, not getting the rest you need can put you, your baby, and other drivers in harm’s way.

“If you consistently have problems falling asleep or staying asleep, you may be suffering from a sleep disorder. You should consult your health care provider if these symptoms continue. Also, talk to your health care provider about the side effects of any medications you are taking,” (name of official) said.

For more information about drowsy driving and ways to prevent it, visit the State Health Department’s web site at www.health.ny.gov/prevention/injury_prevention/driving_drowsy.htm.
NEW RELEASE
Emergency Preparedness and People with Disabilities

An emergency preparedness plan for a person with a disability should include a personal support network or a “self-help team,” consisting of family members and friends who know about the individual’s special needs and who are willing to help if disaster strikes.

“If you have disabilities and need help in your daily routine, establishing a self-help team will help reduce the unnecessary panic, fear and inconvenience in an emergency,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

Members of a personal support network may be roommates, relatives, neighbors, friends and co-workers. They should be available during or immediately after the disaster. They should be trustworthy and care about safety of the person with the disability. They should know the person’s capabilities and needs and be able to make the necessary health and safety arrangements following an emergency. Separate self-help networks for the home, school, workplace, volunteer site or any other place the person with the disability spends a lot of time.

The American Red Cross guide, *Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities*, advises including the following information in personal support network plans:

- Do not depend on one person. Include a minimum of three people in each of your networks.
- Think about what your needs will be during an emergency, and begin writing your plan. Describe your needs in the areas of personal care, personal care equipment, medications (prescription and over-the-counter medicines), adaptive feeding devices, and electricity-dependent equipment and transportation. If you have a service animal, such as a seeing-eye dog, write that into the plan. Record the name and address of
more than one medical facility if you are dependent on any life-sustaining equipment or treatment.

- Give the network members copies of your evacuation plans and relevant emergency documents.
- Contact your local emergency information management office and fire department. Many maintain a registry of people with disabilities so they can be located and given assistance quickly in an emergency. Ask to add your name.
- Arrange with members of your network to check on you immediately if local officials give an evacuation order or if an emergency occurs. Agree on how you and your network will communicate during and after an emergency. Consider knocking on a wall or door, using a whistle, bell, or high-pitched noisemaker; hanging a sheet outside your window, or keeping paper and pencils handy for written communication.
- Give network members copies of your house and car keys.
- Show network members how to operate and safely move the equipment that you use for your disability. Ask them to practice using it, so that during an emergency, they will feel confident helping you. Label your equipment, and attach instruction cards on how to use and move each item. Laminate the instruction cards for added durability.
- Show network members how to operate your wheelchair so they can move you if necessary. Label the chair with its size and instructions for storage and transportation.

Persons with disabilities should practice their disaster plan, and review and revise it when necessary, sharing all changes with their self-help network members. For more information on emergency preparedness, visit the New York State Department of Health Web site at [http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/emergency](http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/emergency).
NEWS RELEASE
An Emergency Food Supply

(Name of local health agency) emergency planners recommend keeping at least a three-day supply of extra food and water on hand.

“Planning and maintaining that inventory is manageable if you treat your emergency food supply as an extension of your regular food pantry, (name and title of official) said.

“You may have canned tuna, meats, beans, fruits and vegetables already on hand. For your everyday food pantry to do double duty, you may have to buy a few more foods. However, even if you are on a budget or live alone, it is possible to stock extra foods for a minimal cost,” (he/she) said.

Buy items on sale and use coupons for extra savings. Buy in bulk and share the costs with friends and other families. Mark bottled, jarred and canned foods with purchase and expiration dates. Rotate the foods, using the oldest first. Remember to restock as food is used up.

Good choices for emergency foods should:

- Have a long storage life.
- Require little or no cooking, water, or refrigeration, in case utilities are disrupted.
- Meet the needs of babies, pregnant and nursing women, or other family members who are on special diets.
- Meet pets' needs.
- Not be very salty or spicy. Such foods increase the need for drinking water, which may be in short supply.
When storing foods follow these tips:

- It is not necessary to buy dehydrated or other foods specifically promoted for emergencies. Regular canned foods and dry mixes will remain fresh for about 2 years.

- Certain storage conditions can enhance the shelf life of canned and dried foods. The ideal location is a cool, dry, dark place. The best temperature is 40 to 60° F. Keep foods away from ranges or refrigerator exhausts. Heat causes many foods to spoil more quickly.

- Keep food away from petroleum products, such as gasoline, oil, paints, and solvents. Some food products absorb their smell.

- Protect food from rodents and insects. Items stored in boxes or in paper cartons will keep longer if they are heavily wrapped or stored in airtight containers.

- Date all food items. Use and replace food before it loses freshness.

Have these items available to safely prepare meals in an emergency situation:

- Cooking utensils,

- Knives, forks, and spoons,

- Paper plates, cups, and towels,

- A manual can- and bottle-opener,

- Heavy-duty aluminum foil,

- Gas or charcoal grill or camp stove, and

- Fuel for cooking outside, such as charcoal. (CAUTION: Never burn charcoal or indoors. The fumes are deadly when concentrated indoors.)

Every home should have a supply of water stored for at least three days of emergency use. The health department recommends storing at least one gallon (more if possible) per person per day.

To learn more about emergency preparedness, visit the New York State Department of Health website at [www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency).
We can’t live without water, so what would happen if there were an emergency and no cleaning drinking were available? Today’s emergency plans recommend that everyone keep supplies of bottled water on hand and know where to look for alternative water sources if the bottled water is gone and tap water and other water sources are exhausted or contaminated.

“We need clean water to drink and use. An emergency may knock out or contaminate water sources. You may run out of your supply of bottled water. Learn today where to find alternate water sources for drinking in and around your house,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

At home, you can treat and use water from the water heater, pipes and toilet reserve tank. Outside, there is rainwater, rivers, streams, ponds, snow and pools. The water should be treated prior to use by bringing it to a rolling boil for at least one minute, chemically disinfecting it with chlorine or iodine, or through filtration treatments, to rid the water of microbes. These filtration systems are found in camping and emergency supply equipment.

“Chemical pollutants, such as oil and gasoline, cannot be safely removed from water so don’t use them for drinking or preparing foods. Also, do not use any alternate water sources that contain solid materials, has an odor or dark color,” (name of official) said.

Some alternate drinking water sources can be used without treatment if you know the water in your household plumbing has not become contaminated. (e.g., the pump was turned off by a power failure). However, if any doubt exists as to the water’s purity, then it should be treated, (he/she) said.
Sources of clean water within the house may include:

- **From the faucet:** Open a faucet on the top floor of your home. Next, go to the faucet at the lowest point in your home. Open the faucet and drain the water you need into a clean storage container.

- **From ice cube makers and trays.**

- **From the hot water tank:** Water may be drained from the bottom drain spout of your hot water tank or water heater after the electricity and/or gas is turned off. This source should not be confused with heating system boilers, plumbing and radiators. Do not turn the water heater on again until it is refilled. Drain the water into a clean storage container.

(Name of official) warned to be careful since some alternative water sources, such as rainwater, snow, rivers and streams, ponds and lakes, natural spring and pool water, may contain chemical or bacterial pollutants and could be hazardous to your health. If you must use this water for drinking, it should always be treated. Water chemical disinfection, though, may not kill some microbes, such as cryptosporidium. In this case, boiling and filtration or a combination of treatments may work better.

As part of your emergency plan, store the amount of water recommended by the American Red Cross. They recommend storing at least one gallon of water per person per day. Make a list of alternative water sources in and around your house and keep it in a safe place. Store materials for treating water (heat source, chemicals, filters) to have it ready if you deplete your emergency bottled supply and have to use alternative water sources.

For more information on alternative water sources and emergency preparation call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency.
Spring heralds the arrival of warmth and beauty to New York State. But it also brings one of the most common and widespread emergencies – flooding.

Whether caused by spring rains or melting winter snow and ice thaws, water damage in your home can create serious health and safety concerns. Standing water and excessive moisture can lead to the growth of bacteria, mold and insects. After a flood, you must take precautions to protect your family from developing illnesses associated with contaminated water, food and air.

It is critical to practice basic hygiene during the emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected.

(Name and title) of the (local health agency name) offers the following advice to help keep homes and families healthy during and after a flood:

**WATER**

- Listen to and follow public service announcements to learn whether the community water supply is safe to drink and use.
- If the water is not safe, use bottled water, or boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning or bathing until tap water is safe again.

**FOODS**

- Discard frozen foods that may have thawed during a power outage.
- Raw foods exposed to flood waters should be avoided because of possible contamination. If raw foods must be used, clean thoroughly and rinse with chlorinated water (two teaspoons of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water).
- Destroy the contents of crown-capped bottles and foods in glass jars. Their food-safety seals may have been broken. Destroy canned foods when swelling, rusting or serious denting is visible.
• Cook all foods thoroughly. Frozen foods that have been thawed should be discarded if not consumed immediately, unless you are sure they have been kept refrigerated at 45 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.

HOUSEHOLD CLEAN-UP

• Power should be turned off in cellars before flooding. If possible, wait for ground waters to drop below floor level before going into the cellar. Otherwise, drain or pump water from flooded cellars. Wash down the walls, floors and other areas exposed to flood waters. Keep windows and doors open for ventilation. Disinfect the washed areas by applying a solution of bleach with a broom. The solution is prepared by adding four tablespoons of bleach to five gallons of water. Allow the solution to remain on the surface for about 10 minutes. Rinse with cold water as soon as possible to minimize staining. You may also use a commercial disinfectant.

• Furniture: Clean and then wash metal and leather surfaces with mild soap and water and wipe dry immediately. Some upholstery may be washed on the surface with soap and water and wiped dry. Expose to open air and sunshine.

• Floor coverings: Flush rugs and carpets with a hose and squeegee, then wash with lukewarm water containing a detergent. Rinse and dry in sun.

SAFETY

• Rubber gloves should be worn while scrubbing damaged interiors with a bleach solution.

• Don't neglect supposedly minor cuts, scratches or other injuries or sickness experienced during the emergency.

For more information, (name of official) recommends the New York State Department of Health brochure Don’t Be Left in the Dark available at www.health.ny.gov/publications/7064.pdf.
NEWS RELEASE
May is High Blood Pressure Month

Nearly 50 million Americans have high blood pressure. Of them, a little more than half are being treated for high blood pressure and less than 30 percent have it under control, says (name and title) of the (local health agency name). One-third of people with high blood pressure do not even know that they have it.

That’s why this May, during High Blood Pressure Month, people should make a point to know their blood pressure numbers. If left untreated, high blood pressure greatly increases risk for stroke, heart attack, kidney and eye damage.

Although the exact cause of high blood pressure is not known, a number of factors are associated with the condition, (name of official) noted. People with diabetes or a family history of high blood pressure are at increased risk. Men and people over the age of 60 are also at greater risk.

You can prevent or delay the development of high blood pressure by:

- maintaining a healthy weight,
- getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day,
- eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products,
- limiting the use of salt or high sodium foods,
- avoiding tobacco products; and
- limiting alcohol to no more than two drinks a day for men and no more than 1 drink a day for women.
You usually do not experience symptoms with high blood pressure. A visit to your health care provider is the only way to find out if you have this condition. It’s a good practice to have your blood pressure checked at least once a year, and more frequently if you’ve been diagnosed with high blood pressure.

Your blood pressure measurement will be most accurate if you:

- avoid caffeine, smoking, or heavy exercise for at least 30 minutes in advance,
- have been seated quietly for at least five minutes,
- are seated on a chair (not an exam table), with your feet on the floor and your arm supported at heart level (by the arm of the chair, or a table).

Your health care provider may want to take a second measurement at the same visit. And, be sure to ask what your numbers are.

If your blood pressure is found to be high, the first course of treatment usually involves lifestyle changes such as eating foods low in fat and sodium, controlling your weight, getting regular physical activity, quitting smoking, and avoiding alcohol. Consistently making these changes may lower your blood pressure to normal levels without the use of medications, or reduce the number and amount of medication that you need to take.

For more information on high blood pressure and how it’s treated, call the (local health agency) at (telephone number) or visit the CDC’s web site at www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure.
NEWS RELEASE
Lyme Disease

Spring is here, which means it’s time for New Yorkers to take precautions to protect themselves from Lyme disease. Lyme disease has become an important public health problem in New York State.

“Lyme disease is spread by the bite of infected deer ticks,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“Ticks cannot fly or jump. They like to rest on low-lying vegetation and attach to a passing animal or person. Once on a body, ticks often attach to the more hidden areas such as the groin, armpits and scalp,” warned (name of official).

Campers, hikers, outdoor workers and others who frequent wooded and tall grassy areas will be more likely exposed to ticks. Because new homes are often built in wooded areas, transmission of Lyme disease near homes can be a concern in some areas of the state. The risk of exposure to ticks is greatest along trails in the woods and on the edges of properties with tall vegetation, but ticks may also be carried by animals and pets into lawns and gardens.

Early stages of Lyme disease are usually marked by one or more of the following symptoms and signs: fatigue, chills and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and/or a “bull’s eye” red rash appearing on the skin at the site of the bite.

Lyme disease is often difficult to diagnose, because its symptoms and signs mimic those of many other diseases. Left untreated, Lyme disease can produce severe arthritis, or cause neurological or cardiac problems. However, with early detection and treatment with antibiotics, recovery from Lyme disease is usually rapid and complete.

“Domestic animals, such as dogs and outdoor cats, may become infected with Lyme disease bacteria, and some of these animals may develop arthritis.” warned (name of official).

Dogs appear to be more at risk from Lyme disease. Symptoms in dogs include lethargy, joint pain, fever, fatigue and kidney damage. While there is debate about whether cats suffer from Lyme disease, cats are thought to be highly resistant to the disease.
You can decrease you and your family’s chances of being bitten by a tick by following a few precautions:

- When in wooded and grassy areas which are likely to be tick-infested, wear light-colored clothing (to spot ticks) and tuck pants into socks and shirt into pants.

- After every two to three hours outdoors, check for ticks on clothing or skin. Brush off any ticks on clothing before they can attach to your skin. Also, check your children and pets for ticks.

- Do a thorough tick-check of your entire body at the end of the day. Pay particular attention to the back of the knees, behind the ears, the scalp, the armpits and your back.

- If you decide to use tick repellent, apply carefully following label directions.

- Children may be at greater risk for reactions to repellents, in part because their exposure may be greater. Do not apply repellents directly to children. Apply to your own hands and then put it on the child. Never apply to the hands of small children.

- No one should apply repellents near eyes, nose or mouth. Also, use it sparingly around ears.

If any ticks are found, they should be removed immediately. Use fine-tipped tweezers to carefully grasp the mouth-parts of the tick close to the skin, and then gently and steadily pull the tick out without twisting or squeezing.

After removing the tick, wash the bite area thoroughly, apply antiseptic, and mark the area to watch for symptoms. (Name of official) reminded people that gasoline, kerosene, petroleum jelly or hot matches should never be used to remove ticks.

For more information about Lyme disease, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number) or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme.
Many Americans find the arrival of spring to be a pleasant change after a long and harsh winter. However, you may not find this change to be so pleasant if you are one of the 1.1 million New York State adults or 35 million Americans suffering from “seasonal allergic rhinitis,” better known as seasonal allergies. If you fall in this category, you are likely spending this time of year wiping your eyes, blowing your nose, or just feeling miserable.

May is Allergy and Asthma Awareness Month, when the (local health agency name) encourages you to learn more about allergies and to implement strategies to prepare yourself for the upcoming allergy season.

“Many people who battle asthma and allergies are allergic to certain tree, grass and weed pollens. These can linger in the air for as many as eight months out of the year, from March through October,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). “These symptoms can even begin while snow is still on the ground,” (he/she) said.

Pollen is in the air as soon as buds open on the trees. People who are allergic to pollen react with symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, coughing, postnasal drip, and itchy eyes, nose, or throat.

“Pollen can travel for miles in the air or can come from nearby plants. There are measures that can be taken in order to stay more comfortable during the allergy season,” (name of official) said.

The (local health agency name) recommends you follow some of these
strategies to help alleviate allergy symptoms:

- **Check the forecast.** Whenever possible, avoid going outside, particularly between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., as this is when pollen counts are usually at their highest. Rainy and cloudy days are often more comfortable for seasonal allergy sufferers. Keep windows and doors closed whenever possible, and use an air conditioner instead of fans. Fans can promote the spread of pollen.

- **Know when treatment is necessary.** People with mild allergy symptoms may successfully control these symptoms by avoiding the outdoors during periods of high pollen. Your symptoms can also be controlled through the use of over-the-counter or prescription medications. However, if symptoms such as difficulty in breathing, persistent cough, or sleeping difficulties worsen, you may need to implement a new strategy to cope. You should discuss your symptoms with your physician as soon as possible. 4

  Also, ask your physician about allergy testing. This is a method used to pinpoint some allergies, which will help your physician prescribe the proper treatment.

  For more information about coping with allergies, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).
The pain of arthritis is the most common cause of disability that people face in their lives. At some time in our lives almost all of us will experience arthritis or have a family member who has this potentially disabling health problem.

In New York State, about 3.7 million people live with arthritis. In 2005 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), estimated that the number of adult New Yorkers with doctor-diagnosed arthritis will increase by 19 percent by 2030.

Arthritis comprises more than 100 different diseases and conditions affecting joints, the surrounding tissues and other connective tissues. It is characterized by inflammation of the affected areas, causing pain, swelling and limited movement in the joints and connective tissues.

May is Arthritis Awareness Month, when the (local health agency name) reminds everyone that people with arthritis do better if they stay active. At least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, three or more days a week, can help relieve arthritis pain and stiffness and provide more energy.

The goals of a physical activity program for people with arthritis are to preserve or restore range of motion and flexibility around affected joints, increase muscle strength and endurance, and increase aerobic conditioning.

“Physical activity is essential to improving both physical and mental health and can play a vital role in the management of arthritis. Regular physical activity can keep the muscles around affected joints strong, decrease bone loss and may help control joint swelling and pain,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).
“Regular activity replenishes lubrication to the cartilage of the joint and reduces
stiffness and pain. When you are active you also help to enhance energy, decrease fatigue
and improve sleep. Physical activity can enhance weight loss and promote long-term
weight management in those with arthritis who are overweight,” (he/she) said.

For people with arthritis, low-impact activities at a moderate pace are best.
Walking, swimming and biking are particularly good because they will strengthen your
heart and help you control your weight if you do them regularly. Everyday activities,
such as dancing, gardening and washing the car, are also good. If it has been a while
since you have done physical activity, you can do it in 10-minute increments and
gradually work your way up to 30 minutes a day.

“The most beneficial thing is to choose an activity that moves your large muscle
groups, makes you breathe a little harder and makes your heart beat a little faster,” said
(name of official).

The New York State Department of Health Arthritis Program works with local
Arthritis Foundation chapters and others to promote self-management courses.

The Arthritis Foundation Self Help Program is available at locations across New
York State. The course is designed to help people learn and practice the different skills
needed to build an individualized self-management program, which includes physical
activity and healthy nutrition. The six-week Self Help Program consists of weekly two-
hour sessions guided by trained instructors.

To learn more about arthritis self-management and the availability of local
programs, visit the State Health Department’s web site at
www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/arthritis.
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To learn more about arthritis self-management and the availability of local programs, visit the State Health Department’s web site at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/arthritis.
NEWS RELEASE
May is Stroke Awareness Month

About every 60 seconds someone in the United States has a stroke. Every three minutes, one of these stroke victims dies. After heart disease and cancer, stroke is the third leading cause of death and is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability.

Nearly 30 percent of strokes happen to people younger than 65 years of age.

(Name and title of official) of the (local health agency name) wants people to know the benefits of learning the signs of stroke. Emergency room staff can administer new, effective treatments that limit the damage a stroke may cause, but those treatments must be started as soon as possible.

A stroke can be thought of as a "brain attack," similar to a heart attack. When it comes to warning signs of stroke, think F.A.S.T.:

- “Face”: Is one side of the face drooping down?
- “Arm”: Is one arm hanging down and/or unable to be lifted?
- “Speech”: Is the speech slurred, confusing or is the person unable to speak at all?
- “Time”: It’s important to call 911 immediately if someone has any of these symptoms.

"Because stroke symptoms are not necessarily painful, the warning signs often go unrecognized and people frequently do not seek emergency treatment. The difference between recovery and permanent disability may depend on how fast a stroke victim receives treatment.

“To get the full benefit of treatment, it’s important to get to the hospital within the first hour of experiencing any symptoms. There are new drugs that, if administered within three hours after the onset of stroke symptoms, can greatly reduce long term effects of the most common type of stroke,” (name of official) said.
A stroke occurs when a blood vessel bringing oxygen and nutrients to the brain bursts or is clogged by a blood clot or some other obstruction. This rupture or blockage keeps part of the brain from getting the oxygen it needs.

Stroke is largely preventable by practicing healthy lifestyle habits that also help reduce the risk and severity of heart disease. The (local health agency name) recommends the following:

- **Control high blood pressure.** This is the single most important risk factor. Know your blood pressure and have it checked at least once every two years. It should be less than 120/80mm Hg.

- **Control Diabetes.** While diabetes is treatable, it still increases a person's risk of stroke. People with diabetes often have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and are overweight, increasing their stroke risk even more. If you have diabetes, work closely with your doctor to manage it.

- **Maintain healthy blood cholesterol levels.** Talk to your health care provider about what’s right for you.

- **Take part in regular physical activity.** Being inactive or obese can increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Go on a brisk walk, take the stairs and do whatever you can to make your life more active.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.**

- **Stop smoking.** Cigarette smoking is the number one preventable risk factor for stroke. Don't smoke or use other forms of tobacco. The nicotine and carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood. They also damage the walls of blood vessels, making clots more likely to form. Smokers who use oral contraceptives have a higher risk of stroke.

- **Get regular medical check-ups.**

For more information on stroke and how to recognize the symptoms, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number), or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/cardiovascular/stroke.
Each June, the week before Father’s Day is celebrated as “Men’s Health Week.”

The (local health agency name) wants you to have the facts about men’s health. “Many men continue to ignore their health. Poor health education and poor health behaviors in the lives of men continue to contribute to a growing crisis in men’s health,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“Men often make their health a low priority. But many causes of illness are easily preventable. It’s a fact that simple awareness of preventable health problems, and the early detection and treatment of disease, can make a profound difference in the quality of life. Early detection by such routine exams as prostate screenings, blood pressure checks, cholesterol testing, colorectal cancer screenings – even such simple tests as those for blood sugar and overweight – can play an important role in staying healthy,” (name of official) said.

“Unfortunately, many men resist seeking routine medical check-ups,” (he/she) said.

“From childhood on, men are taught to minimize their health concerns. When a small boy skins his knee, he’s often told ‘big boys don’t cry.’ Later in life, when a man has chest pains, he’s inclined to minimize it as ‘just indigestion’ because he’s been taught his entire life to ignore or minimize the physical symptoms of his body. These attitudes need to change because early detection and treatment are the best ways to prevent health problems from becoming more serious,” (he/she) said.

Men are less likely than women to see a physician regularly, and are significantly more likely to be disconnected from the health-care system. They are often extremely reluctant to admit that there might be anything wrong until a problem is too severe to ignore.
This reluctance is a contributing factor in the growing health disparities between men and women. The difference in life expectancies between the genders is now more than five years.

Men have higher rates of heart disease and cancer, and higher rates of chronic problems such as high blood pressure and dangerously high cholesterol problems. These are problems that are often treatable if they are detected early. And, of course, there are problems such as prostate and testicular cancers that are unique to men. Men need to see their healthcare providers to assess their personal risks for various problems.

“Men should take the occasion of “Men’s Health Week” as a perfect opportunity to make an appointment with their doctor or other health care provider. A routine check-up can find a problem before it’s serious and contribute to a longer life with a better quality of life,” (name of official) said.

For more information on Men’s Health Week, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number), or visit CDC’s men’s health web site at www.cdc.gov/men.
NEWS RELEASE
Safe Use of OTC Medications

Many of us will be making trips to the drug store for over-the-counter (OTC) medications to help us feel better. Between head and stomach aches, colds and flu, we may walk out of the drug store with many different kinds of over-the-counter medications. They are trusted and used by millions, but each year New Yorkers end up in the hospital because of reactions caused by combining OTC and prescription medications.

Usually, when we think about drug interactions or serious problems concerning medicines, we think about prescription drugs. Over-the-counter medicines do not require a doctor’s prescription; however, they are real medicines, with real benefits when used correctly and real risks when misused.

Risks can increase if you are taking multiple drugs or not reading labels correctly. Consult your pharmacist before choosing an OTC medicine, especially if you are already taking prescription or other OTC medicines. Existing medical conditions make some drugs potentially harmful. For example, if you have high blood pressure or asthma, you could experience an unwanted reaction from a nasal decongestant.

In addition, body changes associated with getting older can affect medicines – how they are absorbed, distributed, metabolized and excreted. Your body may take longer to process medicines, so there can be more time for foods, beverages, or drugs to interact with one another.

The (local health agency name) suggests the following steps to avoid having problems with the OTC medication you take:

- Always read and follow the drug fact label which tells you what the medicine is for, how and when to take the medication, the product's active and inactive ingredients, possible interactions or side effects and warnings. If you notice any new symptoms or unexpected side effects in your child, or the medicine doesn’t appear to be working, talk to your doctor or pharmacist immediately.

- Pay special attention to the active ingredients. This will help you avoid taking too much of a medicine or a particular ingredient, which can be dangerous.

- Choose OTC products that treat only the exact symptoms you have.

- Most OTC medicines are only intended for short-term use. Talk to your health care provider if taking an OTC medicine for a long period of time or if your symptoms do not go away.

- Keep a list of all the medicines and nutritional supplements you take. Share this information with your health care provider, along with any questions you may have.
If you have a sick child, don’t guess the doses. Always read the label. When it comes to taking medicines, children are not small adults. If you are unsure, call your health care provider or pharmacist.

The [local health agency name] offers the following suggestions to be sure you’re giving your children the correct medicine and the right amount:

- Know how much medicine to give and when.
- Know the abbreviations for tablespoon (tbsp.) and teaspoon (tsp.). You should also know: milligram (mg.), milliliter (mL.), and ounce (oz.).
- Use the correct dosing device. If the label says two teaspoons and you're using a dosing cup with ounces only, do not guess – get the proper measuring device. Don't substitute another item, such as a kitchen spoon.
- Twice the recommended dose is not appropriate just because your child seems twice as sick as last time. When in doubt about your child's condition, call your health care provider.
- Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist before giving two medicines at the same time to avoid a possible overdose or an unwanted interaction.
- Follow age and weight limit recommendations. If the label says don't give to children under a certain age or weight, don't do it. Call your health care provider.
- Always use the child-resistant cap and re-lock the cap after each use. Be especially careful with vitamins or supplements which contain iron. They have been a source of accidental poisoning deaths in children under age 3.
- Follow the "KEEP OUT OF REACH" warning. Today's medicines are often flavored to mask the taste of the medicine, another reason to keep all drugs out of the sight and reach of children.
- Always check the package and the medicine itself for signs of tampering. Don't buy or use any medicine from a package that shows cuts, tears, slices, or other imperfections. Report anything suspicious to the pharmacist or store manager.

Drugs serve an important purpose and can reduce the discomforts of many illnesses. Be sure you use them properly by carefully reading and following the instructions on the label with every use. For more information on the safe use of over-the-counter medications, call the [local health agency name] at (telephone number).
NEWS RELEASE
Reduce Sodium in Your Diet

“One of the best steps you can take for improving your long-term health is to cut back on the amount of sodium in your diet,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). Excess sodium consumption has been linked with increased blood pressure and cardiovascular disease – the leading cause of death in New York State.

The average American consumes more than 3,400 milligrams of sodium daily. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that the average diet should have no more than 2,300 milligrams per day. The recommended limit is lower – 1,500 mg per day - for people over 50, African Americans, and people with hypertension, diabetes and chronic kidney disease.

Eighty percent of the sodium in people's diets comes from packaged, processed or restaurant foods. Only 5 percent is from salt added at home during cooking and only 6 percent is from salt added at the table.

"This makes it difficult for even the most motivated person to reduce salt intake. But people who reduce their salt consumption benefit immediately. Blood pressure can decrease within weeks,” (name of official) said.

"Research suggests that reducing the average sodium intake of the adult population to 1,500 milligrams per day could prevent 16 million cases of high blood pressure and save an estimated $26 billion per year in health care costs," (he/she) said.

A lower-sodium diet can keep blood pressure from rising, and help blood pressure medicines work more effectively. Here are some tips for reducing sodium in your diet:

- Read nutrition labels to learn how much sodium is in the food you buy.
• When available, buy the low- or reduced-sodium or ‘no salt added’ versions of foods.
• If low sodium items aren’t available, ask your grocery store or supermarket to carry lower salt versions of foods that are big contributors of sodium (e.g., breads, pizza, mixed chicken dishes).
• Use herbs, spices, and salt-free seasoning blends in cooking, and at the table.
• Cut back on ‘convenience’ foods such as frozen dinners, packaged mixes, pizza, canned soups, snacks, and salad dressings – these are usually loaded with unneeded sodium.
• Buy fresh, plain frozen, or “No Salt Added” canned vegetables.
• Use fresh poultry, fish and lean meat, rather than canned or processed types. Avoid cold cuts.
• Cook rice, pasta, and hot cereals without salt. Cut back on the instant or flavored rice, pasta and cereal mixes, which usually have added salt.
• Choose ready-to-eat breakfast cereals that are lower in sodium.

“Reducing the amount of salt in your diet does not have to be a sacrifice. There are plenty of options that can give you flavor and better health,” (name of official) said. To learn more about reducing sodium in your diet, visit the State Health Department’s web site at [www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/healthy_lifestyles/salt.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/wic/healthy_lifestyles/salt.htm).
NEWS RELEASE
Spring Time is Physical Activity Time

After a long winter of reduced activity, the warmer and longer days of spring season make it the right time to think about the benefits of physical activity.

“Regular physical activity provides you with many physical and emotional benefits,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“Engaging in regular physical activity can be challenging for many people. However, making a commitment to engage in safe, physical activity each day can lead to reduced health risks. Sedentary living is linked to a wide variety of illnesses that can reduce your quality and enjoyment of life, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and some forms of cancer,” (he/she) said.

According to a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey conducted by the New York State Department of Health, more than 60 percent of New York Adults were overweight or obese in 2008. That is an increase from 42 percent in 1997. Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past three decades from about 6 percent to about 18 percent. Today, one-third of New York’s children are obese or overweight.

Combined, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating are the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States, behind tobacco. Obesity is associated with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, arthritis and some cancers. Increasingly, some diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, previously associated only with adulthood, are also being seen in overweight and obese children. Obese children are also more likely to become obese adults.
“The safest and most effective way to maintain a healthy lifestyle, for many people, is through regular physical activity in combination with healthy food choices that emphasize a diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean meats, and limited or no sugar and salt” (name of official) said.

The State Health Department supports and recommends that people of all abilities follow the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans that says most health benefits occur with at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity physical activity.

Physical activity is not just exercise. It is how you incorporate active movement throughout your entire day. You can be active in short 10-minute increments throughout the day, or by exercising for 30 or more minutes at a time. You can find time in your day by cutting time spent watching TV, playing video games, or using computers or other electronic devices for recreation. Many physical activities — such as brisk walking, raking leaves, or taking the stairs whenever you can — are free or low cost and do not require special equipment.

“A common misconception about physical activity is that you can be too old to achieve the benefits. The evidence shows that active older adults can have stronger bones, maintain muscle tissue, strength, and joint flexibility, and have a reduced risk of falling and bone fractures. Safe, regular physical activity can greatly improve the ability to live independently,” (name of official) said.

To learn more about healthy lifestyles, visit the State Health Department Web site at www.health.ny.gov.
April is STD Awareness Month, an annual observance to raise awareness about the impact of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). It’s a time to stress the importance that people honestly discuss all matters of sexual health with their healthcare providers and, if sexually active, their partners.

“STDs are a major public health issue. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are 19 million new cases of STDs each year in the United States, almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

STDs carry a serious price tag in our country. The direct medical cost is estimated at almost $16 billion annually. Vaccines offer protection against two common sexually transmitted viral infections, hepatitis B and Human Papillomavirus (HPV). The New York State Department of Health strongly recommends these vaccines for young people before they become sexually active. People who have high-risk sexual behaviors should also be vaccinated.

“While serious health threats from STDs cross racial and ethnic lines, disparities persist at too high a level. Higher rates of the most commonly reported STDs persist among African-Americans and Hispanics when compared to whites,” (name of official) noted.

STDs have also been associated with increased risk of HIV transmission.

“I cannot stress the importance of testing enough,” said (name of official). “To reduce the impact of STDs, it is important to increase knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and make STD testing a part of routine medical care. Because many STDs have no symptoms, those at risk need to be tested and find out if they are infected,” (he/she) said.

Chlamydia is one of the most common STDs, especially among young women. The CDC recommends that all sexually active women younger than age 26 be
tested for Chlamydia once a year. Women who are older than 26 should be tested if they have a new or multiple sex partners.

Getting tested and treated for Chlamydia will reduce new cases of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Women with PID can experience pregnancy complications, infertility, chronic pain, and irreversible damage to their reproductive organs. Reducing the impact of PID among women also requires men to be tested and treated for Chlamydia to reduce new cases.

“What we sometimes see is that young women who have been diagnosed with Chlamydia may become re-infected by male partners who have not been diagnosed or treated,” said (name of official).

The CDC's *Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines* recommend that sex partners of infected patients be treated to prevent re-infection of the patient and transmission of the infection to others. Those with Chlamydia should be re-tested for the infection about three months after treatment. Sexually active men who have sex with men should be tested for Chlamydia, syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV annually.

Health care providers should take a sexual health history of their patients and follow up with appropriate counseling, vaccination, testing, and if needed, treatment for STDs. Increased prevention efforts, including screening, are critical to reducing the serious health consequences of STDs.

In addition to getting tested for STDs, people who are sexually active can reduce the risk of getting an STD. When used consistently and correctly, latex or polyurethane condoms can greatly reduce the risk of transmitting STDs and HIV, as well as pregnancy.

To learn more about sexual health and related issues, visit the State Health Department Web site at [http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/](http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/).
Eyesight is one of our most valuable possessions. It allows us to see the people and things we love. It is a treasure that we need to protect.

May is Healthy Vision Month, time to focus on your eyesight. Get a thorough eye exam!

“Vision loss is one of the top 10 disabilities in adults 18 years and older. It is also one of the most feared disabilities among older adults because eye disease and vision loss often lead to injury and a loss of independence,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

“Preventive eye care is necessary to avoid eye conditions and diseases that can rob you and your family members of healthy vision. People of all ages, from infants and toddlers to seniors, should be screened for common eye problems,” (he/she) said.

Infants and toddlers should be checked for strabismus (crossed eyes) and amblyopia (lazy eye) during regular pediatric appointments. Adults should be screened for the four leading age-related eye diseases: macular degeneration (central vision loss due to degeneration of cells), glaucoma, cataract and diabetic retinopathy (damage to the retina caused by complications of diabetes). The national surge in the number of cases of diabetes among children and adolescents has increased their risk for retinopathy.

“Regular eye examinations, at least once every other year, are important. Early stages of eye disease often have no apparent symptoms. So, even if you think you can see well, a regular, complete eye exam is necessary to protect your sight,” (name of official) said.
People at higher risk for eye disease, including African-Americans over age 40 (especially glaucoma), those over age 60 (macular degeneration and cataracts) and people with a family history of eye problems, should check with their eye doctor to find out how often they need an eye exam.

The New York State Department of Health recommends that people with diabetes receive a dilated eye exam every year from an eye care professional. People receiving Medicare benefits are entitled to a free comprehensive eye exam and up to one year of follow-up care for any condition diagnosed at the initial exam.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle and taking precautions to avoid eye injuries can help your vision last a lifetime.

The State Health Department recommends increasing your daily servings of vegetables and fruit and three or more servings of low-fat milk or other low-fat dairy products or calcium rich foods every day. You also should avoid tobacco, engage in regular physical activity, control your blood pressure and protect your eyes from the ultraviolet rays of the sun by wearing sunglasses when outdoors.

“Everyone should wear protective eyewear when playing sports, working with chemicals or participating in any activity that could cause an eye injury. It’s particularly important to remind children to wear protective eye gear when outdoors,” (name of official) said.

For more information about how to protect your vision, visit the State Health Department’s web site at www.health.ny.gov/diseases/conditions/vision_and_eye_health.
Do you think heart disease only affects men? The truth is that heart disease affects women as well. In fact, women are more likely to die from a heart attack than men. Almost 39 percent of female deaths occur from coronary heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.

“Heart disease is the leading killer of women in New York State,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name). For women and men, the most common warning sign of a heart attack is discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and returns.

Women are more likely than men to experience some of the other warning signs, particularly shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

People often don’t recognize the symptoms of a heart attack, and wait too long to seek care. Call your health care provider or dial 911 immediately if you experience any of these warning signs. If you are having a heart attack, the faster you can get to the hospital, the less damage will happen to your heart. Every second counts.

The factors that most contribute to heart disease are smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, family history and age.

“Look at your lifestyle, family history and your general health. You and your family doctor can assess your risk and make a plan to avoid potential problems. Although you can't do much about your family history or your age, you can make lifestyle changes to avoid many of the other risk factors,” (name of official) said.
The (local health agency name) recommends the following preventive measures:

- **Don’t smoke.** Smoking and exposure to second-hand smoke are major causes of heart disease.

- **Control your blood pressure.** Treating high blood pressure can lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Losing weight, being physically active, and eating low fat, low sodium food will help control high blood pressure.

- **Control your cholesterol level.** If you don't know your level, ask your health care provider to check it. Healthy nutrition and physical activity are important in lowering high cholesterol levels. However, some people may also need to take medication to control cholesterol.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Extra weight puts strain on your heart and arteries. Physical activity and eating vegetables and fruit rather than high fat food can help maintain healthy weight.

- **Be physically active.** Remember, your heart is a muscle. It needs regular physical activity to stay in shape. Even moderate physical activity, such as walking, can reduce your risk of heart disease. Try to do at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week, if not all at once, then in increments.

- **Make healthy food choices:** Choose foods low in fat and salt and increase the daily number of servings of vegetables and fruit.

- **Take care of diabetes.** If you have diabetes, regular physical activity, weight control, low-fat food and regular doctor visits are important.

- **Know your family history.** Having a father or brother with heart disease before age 55, or a mother or sister with heart disease before age 65 are signs that you may be at higher risk. Talk to your health care provider about your family history.

For more information about women and heart disease, call the (local health agency name) at (telephone number).