

*Keeping you updated on your local health department*

## LLHD and Drop-In Center Bring Nutrition Programs to Parents and Students



**Media-Smart Youth program students go to a local grocery store to learn about food packaging and product placement.**

Over the last five years, LLHD has worked with several local schools to provide programs that aid in childhood obesity prevention. To kick off 2013 LLHD partnered with the Drop-In Learning & Community Resource Center in New London to offer three fun and educational nutrition programs for parents and children of various age groups.

“We believe that sharing and modeling healthy eating and activity habits build a strong foundation for lifetime health and wellness,” said Drop-in Learning Center Executive Director Reona Dyess. “These programs will educate our children to help combat our nationwide struggle involving childhood obesity, low self-esteem and stress.”

The *We Can!*<sup>®</sup> program (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) is a National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute initiative that provides

strategies, guidance, and resources to help families make positive lifestyle changes based on the results of clinical and community studies supported by the National Institutes of Health.

“This program really provides parents and caregivers of young children with a great understanding of what causes weight gain,” said LLHD Health Program Coordinator Carolyn Wilson, who facilitated *We Can!*<sup>®</sup> and two other nutrition programs at the center. “It addresses the importance of regular physical activity, good nutrition and limited ‘screen time’—time spent sitting in front of computers, TVs, etcetera—to help children maintain a healthy weight.”

Wilson also facilitates the Media-Smart Youth program developed by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development for children between the ages of 11 and 13. The program is designed to teach students about how the media influences food choices and how to be a more informed consumer. Wilson said some of the activities so far have included examining food advertisements and explaining how they affect consumer thinking and going on a field trip to a local grocery store to learn about nutrition labels and product placement.

“Teens are constantly

bombarded with media messaging, especially in food advertising. It’s surprising to see the effect this has had when teens can recite certain commercials word-for-word.”

Wilson said. “Media-Smart Youth helps students learn to deconstruct the techniques used in creating these messages so they can be independent thinkers and make healthy food choices.”

Wilson also facilitated a nutrition education program for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students that taught them about the food groups and how to build a healthy plate using the USDA’s MyPlate model. The program included various games and a healthy snack food tasting that illustrated the importance of trying new foods. “Getting kids to eat fruits and vegetables can be tough but if you make food fun and let them be involved in the process of shopping for and preparing healthy foods, it’s exciting for them and they may be more willing to try new things,” Wilson said.



**A program student examines nutrition labels.**

# Volunteers Needed; No Experience Necessary!

## Mass Dispensing

What if there were a catastrophic emergency that required our entire local population to receive medication within 48 hours in order to survive? Would you be willing to help?

It is an alarming scenario, but the reality is that a public health emergency can strike at any time. That is why it is important for communities to be resilient—to actively plan and prepare for emergencies so they are able to bounce back quickly and efficiently after a disaster.

As part of the CDC's goal for local health departments to build more resilient communities, Ledge Light Health District, Uncas Health District and Northeast District Department of Health

are looking for individuals 18 and older that would be interested in helping the community during a public health emergency to participate in a mass dispensing training on Saturday, March 23 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Groton Senior Center.

The training will include presentations from FBI Special Agent Daniel Coleman and Alan Boudreau, Strategic National Stockpile Coordinator at the CT Department of Public Health. The presentations will be followed by an interactive tabletop exercise. Lunch will be provided for all volunteers.

"This is an interactive way for people to experience the set-up of a mass dispensing area in the event of an emergency," said

Kris Magnussen, Supervisor of Communicable Disease Prevention at Ledge Light Health District.

Magnussen said the exercise would be scenario-based to help people think critically and work together to make decisions about what to do in various situations.

You do not need to have a medical background to volunteer, just an interest in helping your community in the event of an emergency!

To register, please contact Kris Magnussen at 860-448-4882 ext. 331 or download and fill out the form on our website at llhd.org and email it to kmagnussen@llhd.org or fax it to 860-448-4885 **by Wednesday, March 20.**

## Disaster Epidemiology

Do you have a desire to help your local community in times of need?

When emergencies such as natural disasters strike, it can sometimes be difficult for people to leave their neighborhoods to get food, water, medicines and other important items.

With many issues arising at once, and specific information often difficult to obtain, it is important for town emergency officials to get all the assistance they can to find out what resources are most needed in their communities.

The LLHD Medical Reserve Corps has an exciting opportunity for volunteers to become trained in disaster epidemiology by joining the **Epi Strike Team**. The

Epi Strike Team acts as a liaison between local neighborhoods and emergency response officials by collecting, analyzing and delivering near real-time information on what resources are needed by the community in the aftermath of a disaster or other emergency.

Volunteers must:

- be 18 or older
- have a valid driver's license
- be willing to drive their own vehicle (mileage is reimbursed)
- be able to walk for extended periods of time, possibly during inclement weather
- have good people skills and a willingness to go door-to-door

All volunteers will be required to participate in monthly training sessions between May and August in addition to a field exercise in September.

As an Epi Strike Team member, you could play a vital role in helping your community recover after a disaster by making sure people get the resources they need!

For more information about joining the Medical Reserve Corps, please contact Kris Magnussen at 860-448-4882 ext. 331. For more information about the Epi Strike Team, please contact Russell Melmed at 860-448-4882 ext. 311 or [rmelmed@llhd.org](mailto:rmelmed@llhd.org).



## Healthy Homes Part of Public Health Week

April is just around the corner and with it comes National Public Health Week! Since 1995, the American Public Health Association has organized National Public Health Week during the first week of April. Each day of the week has a different theme and this year, the week kicks off with “Ensuring a Safe, Healthy Home for Your Family.”

Maintaining a healthy home incorporates many public health topics, including lead prevention, indoor air quality, mold prevention and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning prevention.

We talked with our healthy homes specialist, LLHD Senior Health Program Coordinator Mary Buckley-Davis, to get some tips for keeping your home healthy and safe.

“A healthy home is clean, dry, safe, well-ventilated, free of pests, free of dangerous contaminants and in good repair.” Buckley-Davis said.

Of harmful contaminants in the home, she said cigarette smoke is the most easily controlled. “The best thing you can do for your health and the health of your family is to stop smoking,” she said. “The smoke you generate doesn’t just affect you. It sticks to your hair and your clothes. If you have an infant who is up against your clothes, that child is inhaling that smoke. If you smell like cigarette smoke, that is an asthma trigger for people with asthma. It makes asthma episodes worse and it increases respiratory infections in children.”

Lead is another harmful

contaminant; it can often be found in paint on houses built before 1978. It is not just the painted areas that can be contaminated, as dust from lead paint is easily carried throughout your home. Chipped paint can be especially hazardous for young children. “If you are not sure whether your home has lead paint, you should ask your pediatrician to have your child tested for lead,” Buckley-Davis said. Lead paint can also contaminate the soil around a home, so you should leave your shoes at the door to help prevent the spread of lead.

Fire and CO poisoning prevention are important parts of maintaining a healthy home. It is important

to practice fire drills with your family so everyone knows what to do and where to meet up if there is a fire in your home. Batteries in smoke detectors and CO detectors should be replaced twice a year. “Help yourself remember to do this by changing the batteries when you change your clocks in the spring and fall,” Buckley-Davis said. Smoke and CO detectors should be replaced about every five years and should be tested regularly. She said one way to do this is light a match, blow it out and hold it up to the detector. If it doesn’t alarm, the device is not working properly.

There are many more ways to keep your home healthy and safe. For more information on these topics, please visit the healthy homes section of our website at llhd.org. If you have any questions, please call us at 860-448-4882.



Photo: iStock

## Tdap Vaccine Available

Are you a parent or caregiver of an infant under one year old? Do you work in a day care or other environment where infants are present?

LLHD has Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) vaccine available for eligible parents and caregivers of young children. It is strongly encouraged that individuals who are in contact with infants on a daily basis get vaccinated so they can protect children from pertussis (Whooping Cough).

When infants get pertussis, it is usually from a family member or caregiver who did not know they had the disease. Pertussis is a significant cause of illness in infants and can be fatal if left untreated.

Early symptoms of pertussis are similar to those of a common cold—runny nose or congestion, sneezing, mild cough and fever. After 1-2 weeks, the coughing can become severe and last for weeks. The coughing can become violent and rapid until the air is gone from the lungs and you are forced to inhale with a loud “whooping” sound. In infants, the cough can be minimal or not even there. They may instead have life-threatening pauses in breathing (apnea).

According to the CDC, there has been a recent increase in pertussis outbreaks. As of January 10, 2013, 49 states, including CT, reported increases in disease in 2012 compared with 2011.

For more information or to schedule an appointment to get vaccinated, please contact Kris Magnussen at 860-448-4882 ext. 331 or kmagnussen@llhd.org.

## GASP Coalition Seeks New Ways to Engage Students

Every two years since 1999, the Groton Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention (GASP) Coalition has conducted the Groton Youth Survey to gather data regarding alcohol and substance use among Groton middle school and high school students.

The survey results consistently show that the majority of students do not drink alcohol regularly. In the 2012 Groton Youth Survey, 75 percent of Fitch High School students reported that they hadn't consumed alcohol within the last 30 days, a five percent increase from the 2010 survey.

To raise students' awareness that most of their peers do not drink alcohol on a regular basis, the GASP Coalition uses the data to organize a social norms marketing campaign, which includes posters that go up around the school.

"The purpose of the social norms campaign is to change the students' perceptions," said Michelle Hamilton, LLHD Senior Health Program Coordinator and coordinator of the GASP Coalition. "Based on the survey, the percentage of students who think their friends are drinking alcohol and using substances on a regular basis is higher than the percentage of students who actually do. We feel it is important to bring this to their attention so they don't think

'everyone is doing it.'"

For this year's campaign, the coalition is asking the Fitch High School Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) chapter to post photos on the GASP Facebook page of places in Groton where teens can "hang out" with their friends without alcohol. The photos will be used in a collage poster with the message that most Fitch students don't drink alcohol regularly.

In the 2012 Groton Youth Survey, 75% of Fitch High School students reported that they hadn't consumed alcohol within the last 30 days.

"The SADD chapter students are instrumental in helping the GASP Coalition effectively reach their peers," Hamilton said. "We thought this would be a fun activity for them to do and it really puts the power of the campaign in their hands."

The GASP Coalition also experimented with a "meme

contest" earlier in the school year to drive more traffic to their Facebook page.

"Social media has become an increasingly important way to reach teens. Because of this, the coalition is always looking for ways to attract students to our Facebook page," Hamilton said. "We really want this to be a useful platform to engage with the youth and get their feedback on our activities."

Memes, which are typically a photo of a frequently used character with clever, user-generated captions superimposed on them, have become a popular way for friends to share a laugh on Facebook, Tumblr and Pinterest.

The contest asked students to create a meme that promotes the Coalition's mission to reduce and prevent underage drinking among Groton teens and post it on GASP's Facebook page. After the submission deadline, the coalition voted on the winner and created a poster that encouraged students to check the Coalition's Facebook page to see who won.

"We wanted to do something fun and creative that would engage the students and let them use their creativity to promote alcohol-free behavior for teens," Hamilton said.

Ledge Light Health District  
216 Broad Street • New London, CT  
860.448.4882  
www.llhd.org 

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