

September 15, 2005

Report calls for action on environmental threats to children

Dr. David McKeown, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, today released a report calling for urgent action to address children's environmental health. "Environmental Threats to Children: Understanding the Risks, Enabling Prevention" provides a summary of current science and outlines priority areas for action by governments and communities.

Representatives of the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment joined Dr. McKeown to launch a national campaign promoting public education around the theme "Play it Safe: Childproofing for Environmental Health."

Dr. McKeown said children are more exposed than adults to a range of environmental threats. "Their bodies take in and absorb more contaminants than adults and are less able to withstand harmful effects. Young children are at greatest risk because their brains are more vulnerable, but also because they are closer to everyday exposures, such as lead in household dust."

The research report highlights the impacts of environmental exposures on health conditions in Canadian children, including rates of asthma, learning and behaviour problems and leukemia and brain tumours. "New research provides increasing evidence that children's health is at risk from exposure to environmental contaminants but our knowledge is still disturbingly inadequate," said Dr. McKeown.

The report calls on Health Canada and Premier McGuinty to take on a leadership role: by establishing at the federal level a Children's Environmental Health Program to lead research and coordinate resources; and provincially by creating a Children's Environmental Health Initiative to strengthen provincial legislation and expand public education.

Recommendations also call for a national study of Canadian children and a bio-monitoring program to gather data on risks to health; for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to enhance programs to protect preconception, prenatal and children's health; and for Toronto school boards to invest in maintenance repairs that address indoor air quality.

The report will be presented to the Board of Health at its meeting on September 26th.

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Media contact: Frank Giorno, Toronto Public Health, 416-338-7974