

## **Ontario Childhood Healthy Weights Surveillance System Update # 2 – May 2010**

The Ontario Childhood Healthy Weights Surveillance Steering Committee (OCHWSSC) was formed in January 2009 to bring together stakeholders and experts to oversee the development of an approach to provincial childhood healthy weight surveillance. We are pleased to provide stakeholders with this second update on our activities.

### **First pilot phase underway**

- A pilot approach to measuring the heights and weights of children in Ontario has been developed. It is a school-based approach that ensures the population monitored will reflect the diversity of Ontario's population. Testing of this approach started in spring 2010 in the Eastern Ontario and the Grey Bruce health units and included the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, the Bluewater District School Board and the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board. Results from the first pilot phase will inform further development of childhood healthy weight surveillance in Ontario.
- A draft guidance document for monitoring heights and weights of Ontario's children has been developed. It outlines an approach aimed at minimizing disruption to existing processes and limiting additional burdens to public health units and schools. Consideration has also been given to ethical approaches that minimize unintended negative consequences for children. The approach has been developed based on experience in Ontario's public health units, experience in other similar jurisdictions (e.g., the United Kingdom) and the expert advice of OCHWSSC.
- The guidance document includes the following recommendations for monitoring the heights and weights of Ontario's children:
  - Implement surveillance through publicly-funded schools
  - Make Grade 2 students the focus of data collection
  - Collect height, weight and relevant demographics only
  - Integrate with Ontario's existing oral health programming, which already targets Grade 2 students (Note: Planning for an informative webinar to oral health teams is underway).
- The project will be tested in a phased approach. The first pilot phase will test information materials, equipment, and the measurement and data handling processes. It will ensure that the process for measuring the height and weight of Ontario's children is rigorously and thoroughly tested. Body mass index (BMI) will be used as the indicator of childhood healthy weights and is identified as an appropriate population-level surveillance indicator. In the future, the collection of additional behavioural or other survey data may be considered.
- An evaluation of the first pilot phase will identify where things worked well, and where modifications are necessary. A subsequent test phase will build upon the results from the first pilot phase. This phase will not result in any meaningful data about children's heights and weights.

- Governance models, roles and responsibilities continue to be explored. For first pilot phase, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) is responsible for managing the project including support for the public health units involved in the implementation. The Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (OAHPP) is responsible for data transfer, analysis, reporting and archiving. Funding for the first pilot phase has been provided by the Ministry of Health Promotion (MHP).
- An “Initial Pilot Group” with representatives from local public health units has been established to oversee the implementation of the first pilot phase.

## **Background**

- In the 2008-09 budget, the Ontario Government announced \$10 million of annual funding for a childhood obesity strategy, aimed at supporting programs that encourage children to eat healthy foods and be physically active.
- In April 2008, the MHP hosted an expert think tank to help identify how to best tackle the complex issues related to childhood obesity.
- Measurement and surveillance of childhood obesity rates were identified as key factors for the ongoing tracking and monitoring of child health, and for determining the impact of policy interventions.
- In May 2008 the Council of Medical Officers of Health (COMOH) submitted a Childhood Obesity Surveillance Proposal to MHP, emphasizing the need for a childhood obesity surveillance system in Ontario.
- The COMOH proposal identified current gaps in surveillance and provided recommendations for the MHP to carefully consider when moving forward with the development and implementation of a provincial childhood obesity strategy.

## **Ontario Childhood Healthy Weights Surveillance Steering Committee**

- As an initial response to the COMOH recommendations, MHP provided funding support to alPHa to establish the OCHWSSC to bring together stakeholders and experts to oversee the development of a surveillance protocol as a component of an Ontario Childhood Healthy Weights initiative.
- The OCHWSSC is co-chaired by alPHa (represented by Linda Stewart) and OAHPP (represented by Ruth Sanderson). Committee members have expertise in child health and well-being, surveillance, measurement and assessment, nutrition, physical activity, healthy weights, measurement tools, protocol development, research ethics, knowledge of the education sector and comprehensive school health. The OCHWSSC also includes representation from MHP, the Ministry of Education and local public health units.
- The OCHWSSC has collected a wide range of information about childhood healthy weights surveillance, including both provincial and international research and practice. It has also met with a variety of interested parties (such as TARGetKids!, NutriStep, and Dr. Gail McVey) to explore opportunities, consider relevant principles and plan strategies to mitigate risk going forward.

- An assessment of recent childhood healthy weights surveillance activities at local health units was completed, including a focus group session with six Ontario health units, to share what was learned from their local surveillance activities.

For more information, contact the co-chairs of the Ontario Childhood Healthy Weights Surveillance Steering Committee:

Linda Stewart  
Executive Director, alPHa  
Tel. 416-595-0006 x 22  
[linda@alphaweb.org](mailto:linda@alphaweb.org)

Ruth Sanderson  
Epidemiologist, Chronic Disease  
Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion  
Tel. 647-260-7408  
[ruth.sanderson@oahpp.ca](mailto:ruth.sanderson@oahpp.ca)