



Health Capsules

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Region's Jurisdictions Make "Fatal Fifteen" List

The National Safety Council announced their annual list of the 15 most fatal states due to impaired driving under the influence of alcohol. The "Fatal Fifteen" — states where at least 41 percent of all traffic accidents are alcohol related — included both Maryland and the District of Columbia. Maryland ranked ninth on the list, and D.C. ranked fourteenth. D.C. is a repeat offender for the second year in a row. Forty-five percent of all fatalities in Maryland were alcohol-related this year, compared with an average of 39 percent nationally. Statistics show that 17,000 drivers were killed nationwide last year in alcohol-related crashes, with 6,000 of them in the Fatal Fifteen. Maryland Gov-

ernor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. wants to reintroduce legislation that would automatically suspend the license of anyone under 21 who drives under the influence of alcohol. The National Highway Safety Administration and National Safety Council have partnered with End Needless Death on our Roadways and Discount Tire Company to increase awareness and implement programs to keep roads safer this holiday season.

For more information about the National Safety Council, visit: www.nsc.org

Volume 5, Issue 6

July/August 2006

Inside this issue:

District joins Maryland in Smoking ban 2

Prince William County asks Virginia for help in Gang Violence 2

What is public health? 2

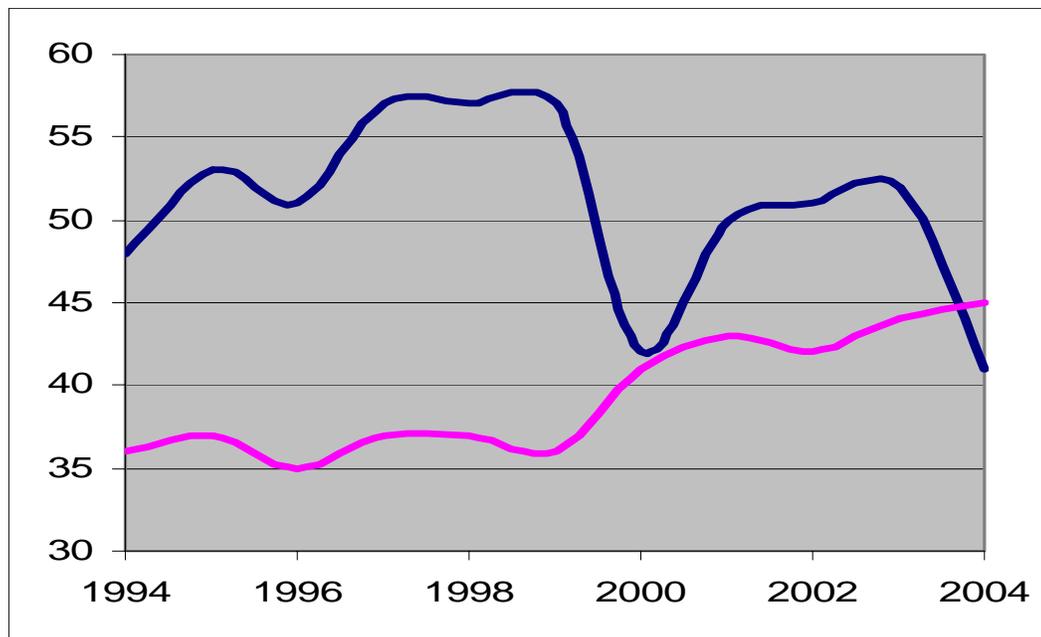
Passive smoking and cervical cancer 3

The truth about Mercury and Fish 3

The connection between Magnesium, Obesity, and Diabetes in children 3

COG hosts Youth Development Conference 4

Ten-Year trend of Alcohol-Related Vehicle Fatalities in Maryland and the District of Columbia from 1994-2004



— District of Columbia
— Maryland

<http://www.fars.nhtsa.dot.gov>



District Joins Maryland in Smoking Ban

The District implemented its smoke-free workplaces law in April, which prohibits smoking in restaurant dining areas, apartment lobbies, and offices. The regulations become tougher on January 1, 2007, when the ban will prohibit smoking in nightclubs, bar areas of restaurants, and taverns. D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams refused to sign the bill after it was approved by the Council in January, citing the law as placing too much restriction on individual dining and working choices. D.C. joins other jurisdictions in implementing a smoking ban. Montgomery County has had a ban in place for a year, and Prince George’s County implemented a policy in January 2006. Health groups in Annapolis are looking to these jurisdictions as positive examples for a further ban on smoking in restaurants and bars throughout all of Maryland.

The smoking ban debate has been a hot topic throughout the metropolitan region, with Maryland thus far experiencing the most success. Proponents of the smoking ban throughout Maryland cite statistics from Montgomery County that indicate no profit loss — and in fact reveal an increase in business — for restaurants in the year following the smoking ban. Opponents of the ban, namely the Restaurant Association of Maryland, are quick to point out that restaurants and especially bars with liquor licenses remain stagnant in their business after a steady profit increase in the years before the ban. When the Prince George’s ban goes into effect in January, more than one-third of Maryland’s population will be in smoke-free communities.

According to a report released by a coalition of public health organizations including the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society and American Lung Association, the District ranks last in the nation for funding programs to protect children against tobacco. The report claims the city spent none of the \$57.5 million it received from last year’s tobacco settlement and tax revenues on anti-smoking initiatives for children, but instead has used the money to address budget shortcomings or general fund needs.

Tobacco's Toll in the District of Columbia	
High school students who smoke	13.2%
Kids (under 18) who become new daily smokers each year	600
Kids now under 18 and alive who will ultimately die prematurely from smoking	7,100
Adults who smoke	21.0%
Adults who die each year	720
Annual health care costs directly caused by smoking	\$224 million

City officials argue that these numbers are misleading. This year the District entered an agreement with 40 other states and 7-Eleven Inc. to cut down on the sales of tobacco to minors, including 22 stores in the District. D.C. has a special unit within the Department of Health dedicated to tobacco control, and gave \$400,000 to the D.C. American Lung Association program of cessation.

Prince William County Seeks Gang Law Change

Prince William County Board Supervisors are asking the Commonwealth of Virginia to add two more crimes to its list defining gang activity.

The acts of weapon concealment and grand larceny were to be voted on for addition to the list of Predicate Criminal Acts in 2006 Legislative Program at the Senate Courts of Justice Committee meeting in January. However, the committee decided to report SB136 for further deliberation. The bill was also re-referred to the Senate Finance Committee to assess its financial impact—estimated to be \$193,000—where no developments have taken place.

The additions would have broadened the scope of what prosecutors can charge.

Those skeptical of these additions say the gang list is already extensive. Del. Dave Albo, who is also Court Justice and Committee Chair, said: “If they can’t prove they are in a gang with the list we have now, maybe they aren’t in a gang.” He also said that adding larceny to the list will complicate situations unrelated to gangs, and could have potential to wrongly sentence youth to prison for gang involvement.

What is Public Health?
www.whatispUBLICHEALTH.org is a website developed by the American Public Health Association with Pfizer to give young professionals information ranging from the impact of public health to federal health resources



REGIONAL HEALTH STUDIES

Magnesium Deficiency in Obese Children May Be Linked to Diabetes

A University of Virginia (UVA) study has established yet another link to obesity and the development of Type II diabetes among children and adolescents. While nutrition profile has always been known to play an important role in diabetes and obesity, the exact role of specific nutrients is still unclear. Comparing obese non-diabetic children with matched lean counterparts, the UVA study discovered that the leaner subjects ingested more magnesium from green leafy vegetables, fish, beans, yogurt, nuts, and peanut butter. Magnesium deficiency leads to increased insulin resistance, which is associated with an increased risk for developing Type II diabetes later on in life. Further study still needs to be done on whether increased magnesium intake will be useful in improving insulin sensitivity, but this study proves another great reason for healthier lifestyles among children, and highlights the importance of increased physical activity and improved diets potentially provided by schools.

Source: *Diabetes Care*. 2005;28:1175-1181

Mercury & Fish



A recent study involving Baltimore residents between the ages of 50-70 examined the relationship between blood-mercury levels and neurobehavioral outcomes. The 1140 participants had whole blood samples taken and took part in 12 tests to be measured for neurological deficit. Results indicated that higher blood mercury levels were not adversely related to neurobehavioral tests scores. Given the detrimental effects mercury exposure from fish has on unborn children, these researchers wanted to examine the effect on a different population—those over 50. Because blood mercury levels never got as high as the EPA, FDA, and NRC warned they would, cognitive effects on older populations are still unknown. However, it is still safe to recommend fish consumption a couple of times a week for older patients.

Blood Mercury Levels and Neurobehavioral Function. Weil M, Bressler J, Parsons P, Bolla K, Glass T, Schwartz B JAMA. 2005;293:1875-1882



Even Passive Smoking May Increase Risk of Cervical Cancer



Results of a recently published long-term prospective study sponsored by the Maryland Cigarette Restitution Fund and National Institute of Health shows that even passive smoking increases the risk of cervical cancer. The study followed two separate groups of participants who signed up in 1963 and 1975 in Washington County, MD. Participants were categorized based on smoking status and exposure to secondary smoke. Using Washington County cancer registries, the incidence of cervical cancer was recorded in both cohorts between the years 1963-1978 and 1975-1994.

While active smoking has been firmly established as a major risk factor for cervical cancer among women, exposure to smoke is now postulated to have the same affect as inhaling tobacco directly. The relative risk of cervical cancer was highest for women in both study cohorts who were current smokers, and the relative risk of those women exposed to secondary smoke remained high—especially in those women who were exposed in the household or from a spouse. Former smokers exhibited no increased risk.

Quantification of secondary smoke exposure has yet to be related to levels of increased risk. This study, however, supports the theory that along with active smoking, passive exposure puts people at increased risk for cervical cancer.

Source: www.dhmh.state.md.us

Healthy Kids in Northern Virginia

As the obesity epidemic continues to flood the nation, one compelling pilot study—Partnership for Healthy Kids—evaluated the impact of three important health aspects in three different northern Virginia schools: access to healthcare, physical activity, and healthier food choices. Through the pilot program, families were exposed to various healthcare options through the school and children were provided with activity and healthy food choices.

As a result of the project, children enhanced their overall knowledge of diet, developed an intention to reduce soda intake, employed an interactive nutrition curriculum called “Nutrition Jam” in some classrooms, and improved self-efficacy through continued contact with high school peers. Information on this health effort is being made available to parents and educators for potential implementation in other areas.

Reynolds JM, Gonzales ST, Rukenbrod M. Childhood Obesity Prevention: A school-based pilot targeting educators, parents and children for the promotion of behavioral change. Program and abstracts of the American Public Health Association 132nd Annual Meeting; November 6-10, 2004



COG Hosts Youth Development Conference: Successes and Benefits of Regionalism

On Wednesday, March 29, COG and the Regional Youth Development Committee hosted "Successes and Benefits of Regionalism: Building a Network of Youth Service Providers in the Metropolitan Area." The event provided the opportunity for participants to assess the value of and need for networking among youth and community service providers in the region. The audience included members from local governments, parks and recreations, human services, and resource and referral agencies.

The Youth Development Committee (RYDC) is a committee of youth and community building professionals from the governments of Arlington, the District of Columbia, Fairfax County, and Prince George's County working together to enhance the quality of life for youth and families. The goal of the committee is to address issues related to youth development, prevention and promotion on a regional basis by bringing together representatives from a variety of youth and community service providers. The March 29 conference pro-

vided a forum to open the committee to new membership and greater regional collaboration.

Due to the success of the conference, the Youth Development Committee is already establishing increased networking opportunities for the region. Future steps may also include exploring current regional gang prevention efforts to reduce gang activity, discussing application of best practices, and identifying training needs and methods for sharing resources.

Anyone interested in participating in Regional Youth development activities should contact Lauren Udvari at Ludwari@mwkog.org

COG is hosting a new youth development listserv. To join the listserv, send an e-mail to health@mwkog.org



The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is the association of 20 local governments working together for a better metropolitan region. COG provides a focus for action and develops sound regional responses to such issues as the environment, affordable housing, economic development, health and family concerns, human services, population growth, public safety and transportation.

To subscribe to *Health Capsules* or to share information on regional health issues, please contact Lauren Udvari at 202-962-3209 or Ludwari@mwkog.org.



Metropolitan Washington Council
of Governments

777 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Phone: 202-962-3200

Fax: 202-962-3204

VISIT US ON THE WEB!

WWW.MWCOG.ORG