

AWARENESS AND USE OF PARENTING PROGRAMS

Issue 18, November 2005

KEY POINTS:

- 81.3% of parents/caregivers with children 0-6 years age in London and Middlesex have heard about at least one parenting program, while overall almost half (42.6%) have used at least one parenting program.
- Considerably more females (91.3%) are aware of at least one of the parenting programs than males (71.4%), and more females (58.7%) use parenting programs than males (26.7%).
- Awareness and use of at least one of the parenting programs is highest among residents who have completed post-secondary education (aware 87.1%, used 49.6%).
- The Ontario Early Years Centre is the most widely known parenting resource among parents in London and Middlesex.
- Websites are the preferred source of parenting information (31.7%).

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BACKGROUND

The first six years of a child's life have been considered by many to be the most important in setting the foundation for life-long development^{1, 2, 3}. For example, the period from pre-conception to age five has been referred to as the "investment phase" of child development, because during this time the brain forms connections that set the stage for lifelong learning, behaviour and health ⁴. It has been acknowledged that a failure to provide optimum conditions for child development during this time makes the developing brain physically different from the brain of children who have been well nurtured, and these differences can have lifelong consequences ^{4, 5, 6}. In the context of these early "investment" years, it is evident that parents and caregivers play a significant role.

Professionals and academics alike have emphasized the role and importance of safety, security, health, learning and adjustment as being a part of the optimum conditions under which children's brains become "wired" ^{2, 3, 4}. In addition to these basic conditions for effective child development, ten specific indicators of family and community success have been identified including positive parenting, parental engagement, family functioning and social support⁷. Research has shown that positive parenting provides children with better developmental outcomes, even among at-risk families, particularly when their parents monitor their behaviour, are responsive to their needs, and encourage independence. This research also includes the extent to which the parent-child dyad includes positive interaction on a daily basis (i.e. how often the parents praise the child, how often they talk and play with them, and how often they laugh together)^{1, 3, 7}. Therefore, positive parenting has an important influence on childhood development, particularly between ages 0-6.

INVESTIGATING PARENTAL CAPACITY AND AWARENESS AND USE OF PARENTING PROGRAMS

In December 2001, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) announced the provision of funding for Early Child Development (ECD) projects. Such funding was allocated to enhance early child development initiatives that support children from birth to six years of age, as well as their parents and caregivers.

In order to encourage positive parenting and child development, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (which assumed responsibility for ECD projects in 2004) has funded a range of projects and initiatives that help children receive the best possible start in life. For example, Early Childhood Development initiatives, early learning and child care, and the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) have been funded to meet this challenge.

The local Promoting Parenting Capacity Program is one component of the "Promote Healthy Pregnancy and Child Development Initiative". This multi-faceted project promotes parenting programs and resources available in the City of London and in Middlesex County.

The 2001 funding announcement also provided funding to Public Health Units in Ontario for traditional survey initiatives that addressed information needs to support Early Childhood Development, including parenting capacity ⁶.

Through this funding initiative, participating health units in Ontario, including Middlesex-London Health Unit, were encouraged to expand or build on pre-existing initiatives in their jurisdictions, including their participation in the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS). The positive parenting RRFSS module analyzed in this issue of *The Health Index* developed as a direct result of this funding initiative, as did the development of the health unit's "Parent Survey – 2004".

In 2004, MLHU led the development of a module, which included a series of questions to assess the awareness and use of parenting programs and to provide local data to direct program planning. The "Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs" module became available in October 2004 and was placed on the Parent Survey-2004; MLHU also included the questions on the regular RRFSS between December 14, 2004 and June 6, 2005. However, only those results from January 10 to May 7 were available for analysis.

The data reported in this issue focuses on questions pertaining to awareness and use of parenting programs and resources in the City of London and Middlesex County. It investigates potential relationships between awareness and use of parenting programs and the possession of positive parenting skills among parents and caregivers of children zero to six years of age. Only those parents/caregivers who were aged 18 or more participated in the survey. Of the 209 responses analyzed, 98.1% were parents of children 0-6 years of age, while the remaining 1.9% were either grandparents or step-parents.

AWARENESS AND USE OF PARENTING PROGRAMS IN MIDDLESEX-LONDON

Parents of children zero to six years of age were asked if they were familiar with a set of six specific parenting programs, with an option to describe any other programs that they were aware of. In the City of London and Middlesex County, 81.3% (±5.3%) of parents/caregivers were aware of at least one of the specified parenting programs, while overall 42.6% (±6.7%) of parents/caregivers had used the programs. Awareness and use of parenting programs among parents of young children (0-6) in London and Middlesex County varied by gender and education while there were no significant differences by place of residence, age of children or household income:

- Gender: There was a significant difference between men and women with respect to <u>awareness</u> of parenting programs with 91.3% of females (±5.4%) being aware of at least one of the specified parenting programs investigated, compared to 71.4% (±8.6%) of males. With respect to <u>use</u> of all parenting programs, significantly more females reported using at least one of the programs (58.7% ±9.5%) compared to males (26.7% ±8.5%).
- Education: There was a significant difference in awareness of at least one of the parenting programs by highest level of education achieved. Due to the small number of individuals in the sample, awareness among individuals with less than a high school education are not included in the analysis. Among individuals with a high school education, awareness was 67.7% (±11.4%), and 87.1% (± 5.6%) among post-secondary graduates. There was also a significant difference in use of at least one of the specified parenting programs. Among individuals with a high school education, 29.2% (±11.0%) had used at least one program compared to 49.6% ($\pm 8.3\%$) with post-secondary education.
- Place of Residence: There were no significant differences between residents of Middlesex County and the City of London with respect to <u>awareness</u> of at least one of the specified parenting programs (82.6% ±11.0% for Middlesex vs. 81.9% ±6.0% for London) or <u>use of at least one of the specified parenting programs (37.0% ±14.0% for Middlesex vs. 44.4% ±7.7% for London).
 </u>
- Age of Children: There were no significant differences in levels of <u>awareness</u> of at least one of the specified parenting programs among parents with one-to-two children

between the ages of 1-3 ($84.5\% \pm 7.2\%$), ages 4-11 ($77.9\% \pm 6.9\%$) or with one-to-two children aged less than one year ($89.5\% \pm 9.7\%$). Among those parents/ caregivers who reported <u>using</u> programs, there were no significant differences between parents of children of different age groups.

- Age of Parent/Caregiver: There were no significant differences among parents aged 18-34 (76.9% ± 9.4%) and 35-54 (85.0% ± 6.7%) with respect to <u>awareness</u> of at least one of the parenting programs or <u>use</u> of parenting programs for parents aged 18-34 (35.9% ± 10.6%) and 35-54 (52.3% 9.5%).
- Household Income: There were no significant differences in <u>awareness</u> or <u>use</u> of parenting programs based on annual household income.

Figure 1 demonstrates parents' awareness of the specified parenting programs and resources. It is evident that the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) was the most widely known resource (cited by $60.3\% \pm 6.6\%$), while programs such as "Becoming a Family" ($8.1\% \pm 3.7\%$) and "Nobody's Perfect" ($7.7\% \pm 3.6\%$) were cited far less frequently.

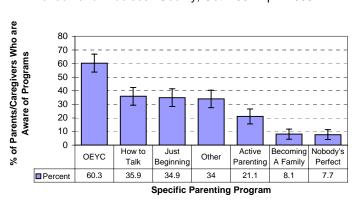
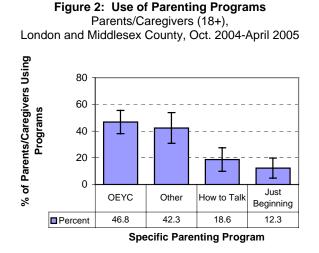


Figure 1: Awareness of Parenting Programs Parents/Caregivers (18+), London and Middlesex County, Oct. 2004-April 2005

Sources: Parent Survey-2004, October – December 2004; RRFSS Waves 49-52, 2004/05

As evident from these results, the OEYC's are well recognized as community agencies that provide a variety of parenting programs and resources. Such programs are often done in partnership with other community agencies including MLHU and are not associated with any one particular agency. The finding that there is significantly less awareness of other programs suggests that enhanced efforts to increase awareness are warranted.

Those parents/caregivers who stated that they were aware of the specific parenting programs discussed in Figure 1 were asked if they had used these programs. Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of parents who were aware of and had used the specific parenting programs asked about in the module.



Sources:

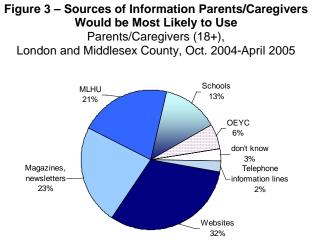
Parent Survey-2004, October – December 2004; RRFSS Waves 49-52, 2005

"Other" programs that parents/caregivers had used or were aware of included the following: All Kids Belong, Baby and Me, Breastfeeding Clinics, Families First, Gymboree, Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Invest in Kids, Kindermusik, London Children's Connection, Merrymount, Multiple Birth Association, Programs at Library, Southwest Regional Autism Program, Sparks, Spectrum Magazine, Speech Therapy, Telehealth, Thames Valley Children's Centre, Well Baby Clinics and the YMCA.

SEEKING SOURCES OF PARENTING INFORMATION

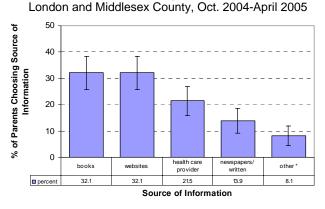
Parents and caregivers have many options when they are seeking parenting information. In the City of London and Middlesex County, there are countless sources of information available. The Parent Survey-2004/RRFSS asked parents which source of information they would be most likely to use based on a set list of resources including: the Middlesex-London Health Unit, magazines, schools, telephone information lines, websites and the OEYC. Parents and caregivers of children 0-6 were deliberately asked about these specific sources of information to seek out alternative sources of information that parents may use to complement the findings from the 2002 Invest in Kids Foundation's *National Survey* of Parents of Young Children. The survey found that physicians/paediatricians were most frequently cited as a source of parenting information, followed by spouse/partner, family, friends and books 8.

Figure 3 illustrates the responses given by parents and caregivers in London and Middlesex regarding the source they would most likely use to get information on parenting. The results are different from those found in the National Survey. Almost one-third of residents preferred using websites (31.7% \pm 6.3%), followed by magazines and newsletters (23.1% \pm 5.7%) and then the local health unit (21.2% \pm 5.5%).



Sources: Parent Survey-2004, October – December 2004; RRFSS Waves 49-52, 2005 Further questioning asked parents/caregivers to provide in an open-ended manner (i.e. not prompted) sources of parenting advice that they use other than family and friends. Figure 4 illustrates the top five sources of parenting advice mentioned by respondents. Respondents were able to check more than one response. In addition to these top five sources, parents also identified that they seek advice from schools, newsletters, the local health unit, the public library, OEYC, telephone information lines, church and television.

Figure 4 – Top Five Sources Where Parents Seek Out Parenting Advice: Other than Family and Friends Parents/Caregivers (18+),



Sources

Parent Survey-2004, October – December 2004; RRFSS Waves 49-52, 2005

(* 'Other' includes: other parents, co-workers, prenatal course, and spouse).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC PARENTING PROGRAMS: WHERE PARENTS HEARD OF PARENTING PROGRAMS & RESOURCES

Residents who had reported that they were aware of the various parenting programs available in London and Middlesex were asked in an open-ended manner (i.e. not prompted) to identify the source from which they received information about parenting programs. "Family or friends" were cited by 33.7% (\pm 7.3%) of parents. The next four frequently cited sources of information about parenting programs were flyers or pamphlets (25.2% \pm 6.7%), health care providers (16.6% \pm 5.7%), newspapers/ magazines (15.3% \pm 5.5%) and schools (15.3% \pm 5.5%).

POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS AND RELATIONSHIP TO AWARENESS AND USE OF PARENTING PROGRAMS

Between March 4 and December 5, 2004, the Parent Survey-2004 included a module on "Positive Parenting Skills". Although a total of 1180 parents/caregivers responded to this series of questions, analysis was completed for those respondents <u>who also</u> responded to the "Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs" module between October and December (n=155).

Among parents/caregivers participating in both modules, 84.6% (\pm 6.3%) of parents had a positive parenting score above the 1994 Canadian average of 13.5 (not shown). High positive parenting scores (between 16-20) were found in 65.8% (\pm 9.4%) of parents/caregivers. Parents/caregivers in the City of London and Middlesex County had an average positive parenting score of 16.7, higher than the 1994 national average of 13.5.

Among parents/caregivers who responded to both the "Positive Parenting" module and the "Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs" modules, there were no significant differences between positive parenting scores by level of awareness and use of parenting programs. There were also no significant differences in the proportion of parents that were aware of and had used parenting programs when comparing those with positive parenting scores below the Canadian mean (24.8% \pm 13.4%) or those with scores above the Canadian mean (30.4 \pm 5.5).

There were no significant differences between awareness and use of parenting programs and the possession of specific positive parenting skills that comprise the positive parenting score. The five specific positive parenting skills that were investigated include: praising their child, talking or playing with their child just for fun, laughing with their child, doing something special with their child that they enjoyed, and playing an activity with their child

For all five skills investigated, the proportion of parents/caregivers who reported that they had used the following positive parenting skills many

times a day or 1-2 times a day, and were aware of or had used at least one of the parenting programs, is as follows:

- Praised their child 84.1% (±5.9%) were aware of programs; while 45.5% (±8.1%) had used programs
- Talked or played with each other, focusing attention for five minutes or more just for fun 81.9% (±6.3%) were aware of programs; while 43.8% (±8.1%) had used programs
- Laughed with their child 80.8% (±6.3%) were aware of programs; while 43.0% (±7.9%) had used programs
- Did something special with their child that they enjoyed – 85.4% (±7.3%) were aware of programs; while 50.6% (±10.4%) had used programs
- Played games with their child (if under 2 years) or alternatively, played games, sports, hobbies with their child if over 2 years of age 86.1% (±7.6%) were aware of programs; while 48.1% (±11.1%) had used programs.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The "Promote Healthy Pregnancy and Child Development Initiative", of which the Promoting Parenting Capacity Program is one component, is a multi-faceted project that involves the promotion of parenting programs and resources available in the City of London and in Middlesex County. In order to gauge awareness and use of programs currently available, the module reported in this issue was developed to provide a baseline description of parental awareness and use of parenting programs and resources, in addition to the use of positive parenting skills.

It is hoped that through the efforts of this parenting project, more parents in London and Middlesex County will become aware of the full complement of resources available to them, and that this awareness will translate into greater use of those resources. The data discussed in this *Health Index* also provide direction for the promotion of parenting programs, services and innovative means for parents to access services, with hopes that barriers to accessing information will be reduced.

This *Health Index* has demonstrated that 81.3% of parents/caregivers of children 0-6 years in the City of London and Middlesex County have heard of at least one of the parenting programs offered, while overall 42.6% of parents/caregivers had used at least one of the programs. There were significant gender differences in both awareness and use of at least one of the parenting programs investigated, with considerably more females than males being aware of or using at least one of the parenting may help more males become aware of the range of programs available, and encourage them to use parenting programs and resources.

It is positive to note that there were no significant differences among parents/ caregivers with respect to awareness and use of parenting programs based on location of residence (City of London vs. Middlesex County) and household income. This demonstrates that messages about parenting and available resources are accessible to all parents, regardless of where they live or their household income. This awareness and use may be increased based on parents/ caregivers' preferred choice for receiving parenting information through websites (31.7% \pm 6.3%), written materials (23.1% \pm 5.7%), or the Middlesex-London Health Unit (21.2% \pm 5.5%).

Family and friends' referrals to programs and resultant awareness remains an important source of parenting information for parents and caregivers in the City of London and Middlesex County. Family and friends were cited by a third (33.7% \pm 7.3%) of parents as a source of information regarding one of the seven parenting programs identified in the parent/RRFSS surveys. Residents also learn about parenting programs from flyers or pamphlets (25.2% \pm 6.7%), their health care provider (16.6% \pm 5.7), newspapers and magazines (15.3% \pm 5.5%) and school newsletters (15.3% \pm 5.5%).

Currently, it does not appear that positive parenting skills are directly related to awareness or use of specific parenting programs offered in Middlesex-London. The majority of parents/ caregivers (84.6% \pm 6.3%) are scoring higher than the 1994 national average with respect to positive parenting scores, with 81.3% (\pm 5.3%) of parents being aware of the specific parenting programs investigated.

METHODS AND DEFINITIONS

All data reported in this *Health Index* are taken from the Parent Survey-2004 and the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System, Waves 49-52 that was collected for Middlesex-London Health Unit by the Institute of Social Research (ISR) at York University. The Parent Survey-2004 is based on questions developed for the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) and analysis of the two modules reported on in this Health Index were limited to parents/ caregivers of young children (0-6). The purpose of the specific series of questions related to "Positive Parenting" and "Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs" was to examine whether or not there were differences in the awareness and use of parenting programs considering sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age of children, age of parent, education, income, location of residence, as well as positive parenting.

Analysis Approach:

This Health Index provides an analysis of a subset of data from the Parent Survey-2004 that was collected for the Middlesex-London Health Unit. in which 1226 parents/caregivers were asked a variety of guestions related to parenting between March 4 and December 5, 2004. In particular. between October 15 and December 5, a sample of parents/caregivers from 155 randomlyselected households in London-Middlesex in which children under the age of 6 years were living were asked a series of questions related to Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs. A further 54 households in the City of London and Middlesex County were asked the same questions (i.e. module related to awareness and use of parenting programs) between January 10 and May 7, 2005 in waves 49-52 of the regular RRFSS. In total 209 parents or caregivers' responses on Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs were included in this analysis.

Between March 4 and December 5, 2004, the Parent Survey-2004 included a module on **Positive Parenting Skills**. Although a total of 1180 parents/caregivers responded to this series of questions, positive parenting analysis was completed on only those respondents who had responded to both the awareness and use of parenting programs <u>and</u> the positive parenting modules (n=155). Each question in the awareness and use module was analyzed by respondents' place of residence (Middlesex County or City of London), gender and socioeconomic status (education and income).

All percentages in this Health Index are provided with 95% confidence intervals. Differences in proportions were considered significant at p<0.05. "Don't know" and "Refused" responses were retained in the denominator for all calculations. Results were subject to suppression if any one of the following conditions existed: denominator of a rate was less than 30, numerator was less than five or if the co-efficient of variation was greater than 33.3.

Questionnaire:

The questions in the "Positive Parenting" module include:

- How often do you praise your child with something like: "Good for you!" or "What a nice thing you did!"
- How often do you and your child talk or play with each other, focusing attention on each other for five minutes or more, just for fun?
- How often do you and your child laugh together?
- How often do you do something special with your child that he/she enjoys?
- How often do you play games with your child less than 2yrs / how often do you play sports, hobbies, or games with your child 2yrs or older?

Further information about this RRFSS module is available on-line at:

http://www.rrfss.on.ca/DataDictionary/PositiveParenting.doc

The "Awareness and Use of Parenting Programs" module of the Parent Survey-2004/RRFSS waves 46-52 was comprised of the following questions:

pp_scrn1:

"Earlier you indicated that there were one or more children age zero to six years old in your household. What is your relationship to the child or children age zero to six, are you a parent, step parent legal guardian, grandparent, brother, sister, or something else?"

0 - Respondent says no child age 0 to six [respondents exit module]

- 1 parent
- 2 step parent
- 3 guardian
- 4 grandparent
- 5 brother/sister

6 - brother/sister volunteers they have a role to play in raising child

- 8 live-in-nanny other paid child care provider
- 9 other relative (uncle, aunt, etc.)
- 7 something else (specify)

98 - don't know 99 - refused

Only respondents who selected "parent" (1) and "brother/sister volunteers they have a role to play in raising child" (6) go on to answer question **pp_1a.**

Respondents who selected "step parent" (2), "guardian" (3), "grandparent" (4) and "other relative" (9) answer question **pp_scrn2**. All other responses (5,7, & 8) *exit the module*.

pp_scrn2:

Are you completely or partially responsible for raising the child or children age zero to six?

- Yes, complete or partial responsibility
- 5 no responsibility
- 98 don't know 99 refused

Only respondents who selected "yes" (1) go on to question **pp_1a**. All other responses (5, d & r) *exit the module*.

pp_1a to pp_1j:

I am going to read you a list of programs and resources for parents with children from birth to 6 years of age in Middlesex and London. Please tell us if you have heard of each one

- First what about "Nobody's Perfect"? (pp_1a)
- "Just Beginning" (pp_1b)
- "Active Parenting Now" (pp_1c)
- "Becoming A Family" (pp_1d)
- "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen" (pp_1e)
- "Ontario Early Years Centre" (pp_1f)
- "Have you heard of any OTHER programs or resources (for parents with children from birth to 6 years of age)" (pp_1i) Response options: 1 – yes, heard of it 5 – no
 - 8 don't know 9 refused
- If respondent selected OTHER (pp_1i), respondents are asked the name (names) of this (these) program(s)? pp_1j Response options: 1 – ves, specify
 - 5 no
 - 8 don't know 9 refused

For all respondents who answered **pp_1a** to **pp1i**, they are asked where they learned about the program (**pp_2a**)

Response Options (not read to respondent):

- 1 Bus ads/transit shelter ads (pp_2a_1)
- 2 Child care centre/provider (pp_2a_2)
- 3 Family member or friend (pp_2a_3)
- 4 Flyers/Pamphlets(pp_2a_4)
- 6 Public Library (pp_2a_6)
- 7 Newspapers/newsletters/magazines (pp_2a_7)
- 8 Ontario Early Years Centre (pp_2a_8)
- 9 Parenting manual (pp_2a_9)
- 10 Doctor/nurse/other health professional (pp_2a_10)
- 11 Public Health Unit (pp_2a_11)
- 12 School (pp_2a_12)
- 13 Social worker (pp_2a_13)
- 14 TV/TV News/Radio (pp_2a_14)
- 15 Web sites (pp_2a_15)
- 16 Other, specify (pp_2a_16)
- 98 don't know 99 refused

Only those respondents who answered **pp_1a** to **pp1i** and **pp_2a_1** to **pp_2a_16** go on to questions **pp_3a** to **pp_3i**. All other respondents skip to questions **pp_4_1** to **pp_4_15**

Have you ever been to/used:

- "Nobody's perfect"? (pp_3a)
- Just Beginning (pp_3b)
- Active Parenting Now (pp_3c)
- Becoming A Family (pp_3d)
- How to Talk so Kids will listen (pp_3e)
- Ontario Early Years Centre (pp_3f)
- Have you ever been to/used Other Parenting Programs (pp_3i) (not specified) Response options:
 1 – yes, heard of it
 5 – no
 8 – don't know
 9 – refused

pp_4_1 to pp_4_15:

All parents who were not eliminated by the screening questions (**pp_scrn1** and **pp_scrn2**) are asked the following:

Other than family and friends, where do you look for information about your parenting questions or parenting concerns?

Books (pp_4_1)

Response options:

- 0 not mentioned by respondent
- 1 yes

5 - never seek information on parenting

6 – only seek information from family and friends

8 – don't know 9 – refused

Courses/workshops/presentations (pp_4_2) Newspapers/magazines/newsletters (pp 4 3) Ontario Early Years Centre (pp_4_4) Public Health Unit/staff (pp_4_5) Schools/Teachers/information sent home from school (pp 4 6) TV/TV News/Video (pp_4_7)Childcare provider/child care staff (pp_4_8) Faith community (church, temple, mosque etc.) (pp 4 9) Neighbourhood resource centre (pp_4_10) Doctor/nurse/other health professional (pp 4 11) Public Library (pp_4_12) Telephone information line (pp_4_13) Web sites (pp 4 14) Other (specify) (pp 4 15) Response options: 0 - not mentioned by respondent 1 - ves

pp_5:

All parents who were not eliminated by the screening questions (**pp_scrn1** and **pp_scrn2**) are asked the following:

Which of the following six sources would you be most likely to use to get parenting information? READ LIST and ask respondent to select ONE.

- 1 MLHU
- 2 Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC)
- 3 magazines, newsletters or other written
- materials
- 4 websites/internet
- 5 Telephone information lines
- 6 Schools
- 98 don't know 99 refused

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This report is also available at: <u>www.healthunit.com</u>.

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