

## DECEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER

### INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION IN PREGNANCY: SAFE AND EFFECTIVE

As fall gives way to winter, thoughts in the public health community turn again to the arrangements we need to put in place to protect the public's health during this winter's influenza season. The 2013/14 season in Nova Scotia followed a usual pattern with flu arriving in November, being highly active over the Christmas period, and declining in February/March. One unusual feature was that influenza showed an extended tapering off with respiratory illness presenting in the community and at doctors' offices into the early summer months. The predominant strain circulating in the province was Influenza A accounting for 76% of all laboratory confirmed cases during the 2013/14 influenza season. One good news story from 2013/14 was that the uptake of influenza vaccine in Nova Scotia, outside of the 2009 pandemic, was the highest we have ever seen. As of January 2014, enough vaccine was distributed to cover 48% of the population; the highest for any Territory or Province in Canada. The success of the program may be attributed to public education and acceptance but also to better access to vaccination. Our traditional delivery route through general practices and the new pharmacy provision both proved very popular with the public.

Influenza vaccination is available on a universal basis in Nova Scotia but we know that it is particularly important for the elderly, children, and people living with chronic diseases to be adequately protected. Communication efforts over recent years have helped to improve uptake rates in these groups but one susceptible group, where we see very low uptake, is among pregnant women. Coverage estimates for this group in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 were approximately 19% although we know that vaccination in pregnancy has a triple benefit of protecting the health of the mother, the fetus and the neonate. Pregnant women who contract influenza are at increased risk for hospitalization and death and have an increased risk of premature labour and delivery. Infants born during influenza season to vaccinated women are less likely to be premature, small for gestational age, or suffer from low birth weight. Benefits of immunity also carry over to the newborn and help protect against influenza and influenza-related hospitalization in the first six months of life during which vaccine is not licensed (NACI, 2014).

**This year we are asking all primary health care providers and other health care professionals who care for pregnant women to spread the simple message that vaccination with the Trivalent Inactivated Vaccine (TIV) in pregnancy is both safe and effective; it is the best way to protect their own health and that of their babies.**

**Dr. Frank Atherton**

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Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

**Dr. B. Anthony Armson**

Professor and Head of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology,  
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The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Interim Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2014-2015 is available at:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni/assets/pdf/flu-grippe-eng.pdf>.

Additional details of the Nova Scotia 2014-15 Influenza Vaccination Program are now available at:

<http://novascotia.ca/dhw/CDPC/info-for-professionals.asp>

The reference website for the public is <http://novascotia.ca/dhw/CDPC/flu.asp>

## BREASTFEEDING BANTER



In 1992, celebrations for World Breastfeeding Week began as a global breastfeeding promotion strategy that is now celebrated across the world in more than 170 countries.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated October 1-7. This is the 40<sup>th</sup> week of the calendar year which represents the week that a baby is born and breastfeeding begins. This year's theme, *Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal – for Life*, is specially relevant to us in Nova Scotia.

The importance of breastfeeding for the health and nutrition of infants is well known. The positive impact breastfeeding has on women's health is also gaining understanding. Sometimes, however, the relationship between breastfeeding and chronic disease receives less appreciation.

Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of chronic disease in Canada. We have provincial programs to address cancer, cardiovascular health, and diabetes.<sup>2, 3, 4</sup> We also have some of the lowest breastfeeding rates. These low breastfeeding rates may be contributing to the high incidence of chronic disease in our province. While our health system supports those living with chronic disease, we also have the opportunity (some would say the responsibility) to decrease the incidence of chronic disease before it even begins. We can do this simply by protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding.<sup>11</sup>

World Breastfeeding Week increases awareness of the importance of protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding. Throughout Nova Scotia, hospitals, public health offices, primary care providers and community partners joined together during this week to celebrate breastfeeding in their local communities. We are fortunate to have so many celebrations for World Breastfeeding Week in our communities. As protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding is a daily responsibility, it is great to take the time to reflect on and celebrate our contribution to this work.

### Did You Know?

Breastmilk contains many natural factors that support a baby's immune system. Breastfeeding also increases the baby's response to and the effectiveness of vaccinations.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup>

As babies under 6 months old cannot receive a flu shot, it's important for mothers to get immunized and pass on temporary immunity to their babies through their breast milk.<sup>9, 10</sup>

### Celebrate Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal – for Life!

- Position breastfeeding as the normal and safest way to feed infants
- Share Health Canada's breastfeeding recommendation
- Link breastfeeding to decreasing negative outcomes in women's health
- Talk about breastfeeding as a strategy to decrease chronic disease and improve long term health and wellness
- Promote breastfeeding to support an infant's immunological health and the efficacy of vaccinations

### References

1. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action <http://worldbreastfeedingweek.net/>
2. Cancer Care Nova Scotia [www.cancercare.ns.ca](http://www.cancercare.ns.ca)
3. Cardiovascular Health Nova Scotia [novascotia.ca/dhw/cvhnsc/](http://novascotia.ca/dhw/cvhnsc/)
4. Diabetes Care Program of Nova Scotia [www.diabetescare.nshealth.ca](http://www.diabetescare.nshealth.ca)
5. Pabst, H., & Spady, D. (1990). Effect of breastfeeding on antibody response to conjugate vaccine. *Lancet*, 336(8710), 269-270.
6. Pabst, H. et al. (1997). Differential modulation of the immune response by breast- or formula-feeding of infants. *Acta Paediatrica*, 86(12), 1291-1297.
7. Pickering, L. et al. (1998). Modulation of the immune system by human milk and infant formula containing nucleotides. *Pediatrics*, 10(2), 242-249.
8. Silfverdal, S., Ekholm, L., & Bodin, L. (2007). Breastfeeding enhances the antibody response to Hib and Pneumococcal serotype 6B and 14 after vaccination with conjugate vaccines. *Vaccine*, 25(8), 1497-1502.
9. Pickering, L. et al. (1995). Effect of maternal rotovirus immunization on milk and serum antibody titers. *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 172(3), 723-728.
10. Shahid, N., et al. (1995). Serum, breastmilk, and infant antibody after maternal immunization with pneumococcal vaccine. *Lancet*, 346(8985), 1252-1257.
11. Kelishadi, R., & Farajian, S. (2014). The protective effects of breastfeeding on chronic non-communicable diseases in adulthood: A review of evidence. *Advanced Biomedical Research*, 3(1), 3. doi:10.4103/2277-9175.124629

We are excited to announce that Welcome to Parenting is up and running. For the first time ever families and health professionals will have access to a free, province wide, comprehensive, evidence-based online program with information for both pregnancy and the first year of a child's life.

Welcome to Parenting is a Canadian-based program that has been tailored to Nova Scotia's key messages and resources. It includes a chat function so that new and expecting parents can connect with each other and with a panel of expert health professionals.

Health professionals and expectant parents who reside in Nova Scotia will be able to access the program through on-line registration at: [novascotia.welcometoparenting.com](http://novascotia.welcometoparenting.com)

Families will be required to submit registration information and provide consent to the collection of personal health information in accordance with the NS Personal Health Information Act. Health Professionals can log in using these steps

- Log in and identify yourself as a Health Care Professional in the drop down menu
- Enter a due date using the generic date of January 1, 2015
- Staff and health professionals will be required to provide their work e-mail address and complete any other required fields.

A detailed evaluation of the program is currently under development. The software includes a monitoring component that will contribute to the development of a population profile that will help determine who is using the site and how. It will also help us to understand the learning needs or barriers of those accessing the program; to track trends and collect breastfeeding information. This information will help in how we target and deliver programs to the prenatal population through varied approaches.

A wide variety of other prenatal resources are also available in communities across the province. Public Health offices have a wealth of information for expectant parents on programs, resources and supports in their areas. For questions or concerns please contact: **Susanne Landry, Coordinator, Family Health, Public Health, Healthy Development Tel: (902) 722-5065 [www.gov.ns.ca](http://www.gov.ns.ca)**

**Welcome to Parenting software works best on:**

- Chrome
- Safari
- Firefox
- Internet Explorer 9 or higher



The Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System (CPSS) of the Public Health Agency of Canada would like to announce the release of a suite of pregnancy-related fact sheets. The fact sheets respond to the Agency's commitment to provide timely information on maternal and infant health in Canada. They were developed by the Agency's Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System (CPSS) based on data from Statistics Canada's vital statistics, hospitalization data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), and from the Maternity Experiences Survey.

The results show that:

- Overall there is an increase in the rates of pre-existing type 2 and gestational diabetes, and an increase in pre-existing and gestational hypertension in pregnant women
- Approximately half of Canadian women are supplementing with folic acid according to the recommended guidelines
- Women who experienced physical or sexual abuse were more likely to experience postpartum depressive symptoms
- There was a decrease in rates of infant mortality attributed to SIDS

**Electronic bilingual versions of the fact sheets are available on the RCP website.**

**WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT PRENATAL CLASS ATTENDEES**

Those attending prenatal classes are well-educated, first time mothers or those with middle-upper socioeconomic status. We have seen a steady decline in class participation over the past three years with first time pregnancies:

- 2011-2012: 42%
- 2012-2013: 36%
- 2013-2014: 31%

Those less likely to attend classes are women living at or below the low income cut-off, younger moms and ethnic minorities.

## Staff News

Please help us to welcome **Cynthia Mann** to a full time position with RCP as a Perinatal Nurse Consultant.

Welcome back to **Annette Elliott Rose**, Perinatal Nurse Consultant who has returned from education leave.

We are looking forward to seeing **Dr. Heather Scott**, Obstetrical Clinical Advisor who will be returning from her sabbatical at the end of December.

## Weight Times in Perinatal Health Symposium

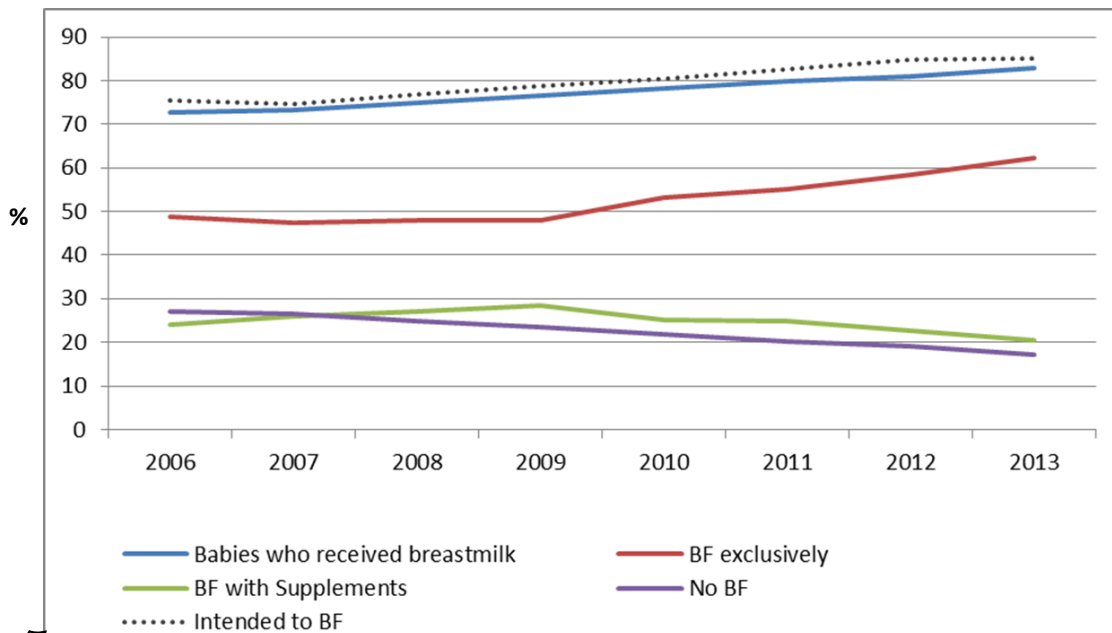
Thank you to everyone who attended the 2014 symposium. It was a great success and the donations to the food bank were appreciated. Symposium presentations are available on the RCP website.

## CODER TIPS PLEASE SEND ALONG ANY SUGGESTIONS TO ENHANCE OUR DATA COLLECTION

It is that time of the year again. We are starting to collect suggested revisions for the April 2015 Nova Scotia Atlee Perinatal Database (NSAPD). As Health Information Professionals, you are our closest resource to ensure quality data collection. If you are seeing a new technique, something new written in the documentation or if you have been asked by health care providers, health leaders or researchers about an element that is not currently captured in the NSAPD, please let us know.

## Breastfeeding Rates in Nova Scotia

Data Byte



Source: Nova Scotia Atlee Perinatal Database



*We at RCP would like to wish you and yours a  
Happy Holiday Season.*

*We wish you safe travels and look forward to working with  
you in the New Year.*



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