



Public Service Announcement

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For Immediate Release

Time to get *active* about *inactivity* ... Turn off the Screens Week is April 25-29th

NEWMARKET - York Region Health Services and the York Region Physical Activity Network are once again encouraging students and their families to turn off their televisions, video games and computers for 5 days, except for use with homework, during *Turn off the Screens Week 2005*, April 25 to 29.

The goal of the program is to increase the activity levels of children, youth and their families. Participating students and families will be encouraged to turn off their televisions, video games and computers for five days except for use with homework ... and to get *active* instead. The program also provides an opportunity to discuss the impact of inactivity caused by time in front of screens.

The research is compelling:

- The average Canadian average child watches 26 hours of television each week, not including time spent on the computer and playing video games. The amount of time spent playing video games by Canadian children is among the highest in the world
- Two-thirds of Canadian school-aged children are not active enough for optimal development and they become more inactive as they get older
- The easiest way to reduce inactivity is to turn off the TV set. Almost anything else uses more energy than watching TV

Schools sign up to participate in *Turn off the Screens Week*. Students who successfully complete the five days without watching television, playing video games or spending time on the computer except for homework are eligible to win prizes. York Region Health Services has worked closely with schools who have registered for the program, providing resources for teachers and families, event ideas and encouragement.

Seventy-two York Region elementary schools participated in *Turn Off the Screens 2004*. Two common themes emerged: an increase in physical activity and more family time. Children wrote about enjoying family activities such as story time at the library, soccer with their dad and grandpa, cooking with mom, playing board games and nature walks with their families. Parents also strongly endorsed this initiative. One parent commented that "This was a great opportunity to participate with our children in more

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activities and refrain from using these things we accept as ‘normal’.” Teachers commented that it also stimulated valuable “classroom discussion on TV habits.”

Turn off the Screens Week demonstrated that for *one week* children learned how to replace screen with fun, active alternatives. This is the first step in developing lifelong physical activity patterns.

Studies have shown that children who spend a lot of time watching television have higher rates of obesity:

- Childhood obesity in Canada and many countries worldwide has reached epidemic proportions One out of every seven children between the ages of 7 and 13 is obese (16.6% of boys and 14.6% of girls)
- From 1981 to 1996, the prevalence of overweight children tripled increasing from 15% to 35.4% in boys and to 29.2% in girls
- 40% of obese children and 70% of obese youth continue this trend into adulthood
- Chronic diseases and health conditions related to being overweight and obese affect children and adults. Some common problems include:

Poor self esteem

Type 2 diabetes

High blood pressure

Heart disease

High blood fat and cholesterol

Some types of cancer

Lifestyle changes have contributed to the increase in obesity in children and include:

- Less active children - 25% of Canadian children spend more time each week watching TV and playing computer/video games than they spend in school
- Eating less nutritious foods - Children are eating fewer foods that provide fiber, vitamins, or other important nutrients (fruit and vegetables) but continue to consume foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar (soft drinks, snacks and candy bars)

For more information on *Turn Off the Screens Week* or other health-related questions, contact York Region Health Services *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 or visit www.york.ca.

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Obesity statistics: The Child Obesity website www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/childobesity/index.htm

