

PRECONCEPTION CURRICULUM SUPPORT HEALTH RESOURCES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The preconception period is an important time to discuss health messages and an opportune time for decision making. Making healthy lifestyle choices now can help reduce the risk of future problems and positively impact birth outcomes should pregnancy occur. There are many things that both boys and girls can do to protect their own health, fertility and the health of their future children. The topics include proper nutrition, exercise and awareness of things that can affect fertility as well as reducing modifiable/lifestyle risk factors. York Region Public Health Services offers these reproductive health resources for schools. They include:

MANUALS AND CURRICULUM RESOURCES

Grades JK-8:

York Region's Healthy Schools Resources: for related topics on [Healthy Sexuality, Nutrition, Tobacco-Free Living and Substance Misuse resources for elementary schools](#)

Key Messages for Co-Factoring Preconception Health with other topics:

- **Drugs:** Stop or reduce using drugs of any kind. Street drugs, including cocaine, heroin, and ecstasy have all been shown to have powerful negative effects on male and female fertility. Long term use of these drugs can lead to lifelong reproductive problems. They could inhibit a woman from becoming pregnant and in men lower sperm count, damage sperm, decrease volume of seminal fluid, and cause poor sperm motility
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol can affect men's and women's reproductive systems, cause hormonal imbalances and damage fertility. Heavy drinking as a teenager and/or in early twenties can affect fertility later in life. Alcohol is toxic to the testes. This can harm sperm when they're produced and stop them developing properly or reaching the egg
- **Cannabis:** There is some evidence to show that heavy cannabis use has been linked to decreased fertility in both men and women. In women there is evidence that cannabis use may disrupt the menstrual cycle. In men, studies have linked less seminal fluid, a lower total sperm count and abnormal sperm behaviour to heavy cannabis use
- **Nutrition:** Eating healthy food and a well-balanced diet can help build healthy sperm and eggs. All women planning a baby someday, should take folic acid daily, even if they are not yet pregnant

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- **Physical Activity:** A healthy body weight and body mass index is associated with better health outcomes for a future pregnancy. Being overweight or underweight can cause hormone imbalances and decrease your chances of conceiving and having a healthy baby
- **Sexual Health:** Sexually Transmitted Infections that go untreated can lead to infertility for both men and women. Prevention against infections, getting immunized and testing before pregnancy is key
- **Stress:** Stress can make it hard to form good health habits and stick with them. It can also make it hard for a woman to get pregnant
- **Smoking:** Smoking is widely recognized as a serious health risk for both smokers and others exposed to second hand smoke. Smoking can cause a man's sperm to have trouble fertilizing a woman's egg. The chemicals in cigarette smoke may speed up the loss of a woman's eggs. Smoking can damage the genetic material in a man's sperm and a woman's eggs. Smokers and those exposed to second-hand smoke have a harder time getting pregnant. There are no safe levels of exposure to tobacco smoke
- **Chemicals:** Exposure to lead, pesticides, solvents and mercury may cause difficulties in getting pregnant for both men and women
- **Safe Relationships:** Couples should take a critical look at their relationship before deciding to become pregnant. Start role-modeling safe and healthy interpersonal behaviours before becoming a parent
- **Dental:** Regular dental check-ups and proper brushing and flossing will keep your teeth and gums healthier, prevent early gum disease and may even help to protect your fertility
- **Immunizations:** Many infectious diseases that can cause serious birth defects or infertility can be prevented through a vaccine. Get all your immunizations ahead of time. Mumps can cause infertility. Women need to be vaccinated against rubella (German measles) as this can cause birth defects if exposed during pregnancy

WEBSITES/RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS

York Region Programs and Services:

- York Region Preconception Health Program york.ca/prenatal
- York Region Birth Control: york.ca/sexualhealth
- York Region Immunization information: york.ca/immunization
- York Region Sexual Health clinics: york.ca/sexualhealth

The Best Start Resource Centre: beststart.org

Supports service providers working on preconception health, prenatal health and early child development through consultations, responding to inquiries, delivering training and professional development (e.g., webinars, workshops, conferences, online courses), evidence-based resources and news blasts (e.g., e-bulletins, electronic networks).

Healthy Eating:

- [Healthy Eating for New and Expecting Mothers](#)

- [Prenatal Nutrition](#)
- Nutrition, food, healthy eating and disease prevention: [UnlockFood.ca](#)

Folic Acid:

To help reduce the risk of Neural Tube Defects, folic acid should be taken at least three months before planning to get pregnant and continued throughout pregnancy.

- [Folic Acid: Are you getting enough?](#) Public Health Agency of Canada

Planning Ahead:

Men and women can improve the health of their future babies by thinking of their health before pregnancy:

- Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada: [pregnancyinfo.ca](#)
- [Best Start: Thinking about Pregnancy?](#) This website is designed for people thinking of having a baby in the near future. It provides information to help plan for the healthiest baby possible. A great resource to get students exposed to various decisions and factors that affect future pregnancies.

Smoking:

It is the leading cause of impotence and reduces the sperm count in men. Smoking also makes it harder for some women to get pregnant. Smoking can cause your baby to grow more slowly and gain less weight in your womb. Second-hand smoke contains the same toxic chemicals and carcinogens that smokers inhale. Smoking can cause many problems during pregnancy for a woman and her baby, such as premature birth, birth defects, and infant death.

- [Smoking and Pregnancy](#)
- [Smokers Helpline Support](#)
- [Quitting Smoking](#)

Alcohol:

There is no safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol when you are planning a pregnancy. There is no safe amount of alcohol and no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can damage the developing fetus. Men who drink alcohol have a greater chance of having a low sperm count.

- [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder \(FASD\)](#)
- [Know FASD interactive tool](#)

Cannabis:

Although more research is required on the effects of cannabis use on pregnancy and lactation, a growing body of evidence suggests there can be a negative impact on a child's pre and post-natal development. It is recommended to avoid using cannabis if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or breastfeeding

- [Risks of Cannabis on Fertility, Pregnancy, Breastfeeding and Parenting](#)

WORKBOOKS

- [My Life My Plan](#)
- [Health Before Pregnancy Workbook. Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it](#)
- [How to Build a Healthy Baby: Men's Information](#)

FACT SHEETS/BOOKLETS

- [What Women Need to Know about Folic Acid](#)
- [Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby](#)

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH REPORTS & STATISTICS

- The Ministry of Health & Long Term Care statistics relevant to reproductive health, environmental hazards, healthy family dynamics, physical activity, low birth weight and pre-term babies, maternal age, smoking and more. statcan.gc.ca
- [York Region Statistics](#)

For more information on these or other resources contact,

York Region Health Connection at 1-877-464-9675, TTY 1-866-512-6228 or visit york.ca