Partnering with Frontline Service Providers

Risk Communication in Children’s Environmental Health

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MTE GLOBALTOX

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Outline

- Project Overview
- Communication Realities
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
Children’s Environmental Health Awareness Sessions

- Developed for Health Canada in support of Canada’s Chemicals Management Plan
- One-day sessions delivered in eight Canadian cities
- Participants included:
  - public health inspectors, public health nurses, nursing students
  - early childhood educators, daycare workers
  - midwives and doulas
- Four project phases:
  - Scoping, Development, Delivery, Evaluation
Why Focus on Children?

- Children often have higher exposures and/or sensitivity to chemicals than adults
- Children become adults
  - some effects occur long after first exposure
  - some substances remain in the body a long time
  - protecting children can help protect adults
- High concern and low tolerance for preventable risks to children
Why Focus on Frontline Child Care Workers?

- Child care providers are sources of environmental health information for parents and caregivers
- Variability in formal training
- Understanding is highly influenced by media, internet, urban myths, and fear
- Limited ability to access and evaluate credibility of information sources
Session Themes

- Defining environment and environmental health
- Identifying common issues
- Risk- and evidence-based decision-making
- Natural vs. safe
- Communicating about risk
- Resources:
  - International, national and local
Key Exposure Media

Air

Water

Soil

Food

Consumer Products
Common Issues in CEH

- Cleaning products
- Pesticides
- Toys
- Natural health products
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Infection control
- Indoor air quality
- Food safety
Communication Realities

- Lack of understanding
  - Science, literacy, numeracy, perception
  - Competing scientific theories
  - Language barriers

- Information overload
  - Fact, speculation and myth
  - Competing agendas
  - Culture of fear
  - Making decisions about credibility

- Cognitive noise
Our Key Messages

- Everything is made of chemicals
- The source of a substance reveals little about its safety
- Risk depends on exposure
- Most chemicals have thresholds below which harmful effects are not expected
- Credible local, regional and national resources are available
- There are tools and methods for communicating effectively about environmental health concerns
Conclusions

- Frontline child care workers:
  - can be influential in caregivers’ perceptions of risk
  - require clear, accurate, accessible resources

- Child care workers will be better prepared to respond to concerned caregivers if they have a basic understanding of:
  - science as it relates to environmental health
  - principles of risk communication
Recommendations

- Build capacity to understand and communicate about environmental health issues
- Create opportunities for involvement and learning
- Provide information appropriate for the audience
- Identify credible third party resources that can be easily accessed
- Be available to answer questions
Resources - Canada

- Government of Canada
  - Healthy Canadians (Kids) - [http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/kids/](http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/kids/)

- Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and Environment (CPCHE) - [http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/)
  - includes government, professional, and non-governmental organizations

- Canadian Institute of Child Health -
  - *Environmental Hazards: Protecting Children* - [http://www.cich.ca/PDFFiles/EnvFactSheetsENG.pdf](http://www.cich.ca/PDFFiles/EnvFactSheetsENG.pdf)
Resources - International

- Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs

- World Health Organization (WHO)
Local public health authorities may have the most relevant information
  • Local environmental and social/economic influences
  • Population health and well-being

Maintain a list of local resources
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