

STRATFORD HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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WWW.TOWNOFSTRATFORD.COM

Health Department Releases Survey Results

In the winter of 2001, the Stratford Health Department embarked on a major research project. The goal was to determine the health status and health practices of Stratford residents. We called over 1,000 households and successfully interviewed 510 residents age 18 and over. Households were chosen randomly from a list of Stratford telephone numbers.

Survey participants answered 77 questions on a variety of health issues including:

- Adult vaccinations
- Barriers to medical and dental care
- Common diseases
- Exercise
- Firearms
- Health insurance
- Health screenings
- Lead and Radon
- Mosquito and tickborne disease
- Nutrition
- Overweight and obesity
- Perception of health problems in the community
- Physical/sexual abuse
- Seat belt use
- Sun exposure
- Tobacco and alcohol use

The information that residents pro-



The Stratford Health Department hired ten surveyors to conduct telephone interviews during evening hours over a three week period.

vided will be used by the Stratford Health Department to develop programs and policies that address the specific needs of our residents.

This newsletter highlights some of the most interesting and valuable information from the Stratford Adult Health Risk Survey. A full 36-page report is available for review at the Stratford Health Department, the Stratford Public Library and on our website at www.townofstratford.com. Click on *Departments and Services*, then click on *Health*.

Thank you! Gracias!

Merci beaucoup!

We would like to extend our many thanks to the 510 residents who agreed to participate in our survey.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY

The Good News

- 94% have health insurance.
- 82% have been to see a doctor for a routine checkup within the past year.
- 75% always buckle their safety belt when driving in a car.
- 73% exercise on a weekly basis.
- 63% said they believe that all restaurants and food establishments should be completely smoke-free.
- Over 80% took at least one protective measure against Lyme disease and West Nile virus within the past year.

The Bad News

- 60% of the adult population is overweight.
- 24% of Stratford residents smoke.
- 49% eat one serving or less of vegetables per day and 59% eat one serving or less of fruit per day.
- 29% of Stratford residents age 65 and over did not receive the flu shot within the past year and 43% have never received the pneumonia shot.

Lead and Radon

Lead poisoning poses a serious health threat for both adults and children in Stratford. Lead paint was used extensively until 1978 and most homes built before then contain some lead paint. Since there are many old homes in Stratford (92% were built before 1980), Stratford residents are at high risk of lead exposure. Lead poisoning most often occurs when lead paint chips are ingested by children, or when lead paint dust is inhaled during home renovations.

Even low levels of lead in children can cause learning and behavioral problems. At higher levels, lead may cause lasting damage to the developing nervous and reproduc-

tive systems. Other problems associated with lead poisoning for both children and adults include kidney damage, anemia, deafness, blindness, loss of hand-eye coordination, hypertension, and stroke.

Radon is another household health con-

61% of Stratford residents have never had their house checked for lead and 12% don't know if it was done.

56% have never had their house checked for radon and 11% don't know if it was done.

cern. It is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which can enter your home through openings in your cellar floors

and walls. Stratford residents are particularly vulnerable to radon exposure due to the geology of the area. In Connecticut, as many as 300 lung cancer deaths each year are believed to be caused by radon exposure.

All Stratford residents should have their home checked for lead and radon. Radon home testing kits are available at the Stratford Health Department for \$10. The Stratford Health Department can also advise you about hiring a lead inspection company. Call 385-4090 and ask to speak with one of our sanitarians.

Tobacco Use

Our survey found that 24% of the adult population in Stratford smoke cigarettes. Another 3% use other forms of tobacco.



Smoking dramatically increases ones risk of heart attack, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, phlebitis, peptic ulcers, impotence, cavities, birth defects, low birth weight, still births, oral cancer, larynx cancer, bladder cancer, and asthma.

Tobacco is very addictive, both physically and emotionally, and that is why most people continue to smoke despite knowledge of the dreadful diseases it causes. The good news is that a large percentage of Stratford residents have already broken

the habit. Nearly 60% of residents who ever smoked have quit and 69% have made their homes smoke-free! Another 63% said they would like to further eliminate second-hand smoke by making restaurants smoke-free.

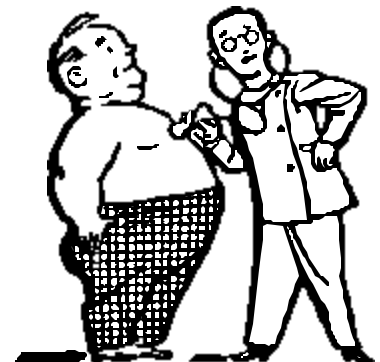
If you are a smoker, the Stratford Health Department would like to help you quit. Join our free 7-session smoking cessation program starting on February 26th, 2002. Call 385-4090 for an application.

Overweight

Overweight and obesity affect the majority of Stratford residents. Our study found that an alarming 60% of the population are overweight. Among this group, 26% are obese. Overweight is associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, hypertension, high blood cholesterol, and certain cancers.

Overweight and obesity are determined by a mathematical equation known as Body Mass Index (BMI).

You can calculate your own BMI by taking your (weight in lbs. ÷ height in inches ÷ height in inches) x 703. A BMI of 18.5 – 24.9 is considered a healthy weight range, 25 – 29.9 is considered overweight, and a BMI of 30 or more is considered obese.



Diet and Exercise

Together, poor diet and lack of physical activity have been cited by experts as the second leading cause of death in the U.S. after tobacco use. Poor diet and lack of physical activity are responsible for over 300,000 deaths annually in the United States!

The good news is that 73% of Stratford residents reported exercising on a weekly basis, and 48% report exercising 3 or more times a week. The most popular form of exercise in Stratford is walking. While 56% said that they walk for exercise, they may not be walking fast enough or often enough to have a health benefit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends engaging in at



least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. Examples of moderate forms of activity include walking 2 miles in 30 minutes, bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes, playing basketball for 30 minutes, or

swimming laps for 20 minutes.

The bad news is that many Stratford residents are not eating enough healthy foods. Our survey found that nearly half (49%) of Stratford residents are eating 1 serving or less of vegetables per day; 59% are eating 1 serving or less of fruit per day! The National Institutes of Health recommend getting 5 or *more* servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

By eating properly and exercising regularly, Stratford residents could potentially fend off a variety of chronic conditions and diseases such as high blood pressure, overweight, diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease and many forms of cancer.

High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, affects 28% of Stratford residents. High blood pressure can lead to heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney failure and eye problems. Your chances of developing high blood pressure increase by being overweight, eating too much salt, and drinking too much alcohol.

The DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) developed by the National Institutes of Health has been proven to be as effective in lowering blood pressure as medication.

The diet calls for 7 to 8 daily servings of grain products, 4-5 servings of vegetables, 4-5 servings of fruit, 2-3 servings of low-fat or nonfat dairy foods, no more than 2 servings of meat, poultry or fish, and 4-5 weekly servings of nuts, seeds, or legumes.

High cholesterol is also a concern for 22% of Stratford residents. Excess LDL (low density lipoprotein) cholesterol in the bloodstream builds up on the arteries walls—a process known as atherosclerosis—which can then lead to heart attack and stroke. Since

the DASH diet is low in fat, it is also useful in lowering LDL cholesterol. Access the DASH website at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp>. Click on *Prevention*.



Call our Public Health Nursing Division at 385-4058 about upcoming blood pressure and cholesterol screenings.

Arthritis

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention characterizes arthritis as one of our most pressing public health concerns. In Stratford, 22% of the total population and 49% of the population over age 65 are living with this chronic condition.

The term arthritis includes more than 100 diseases that damage the joints

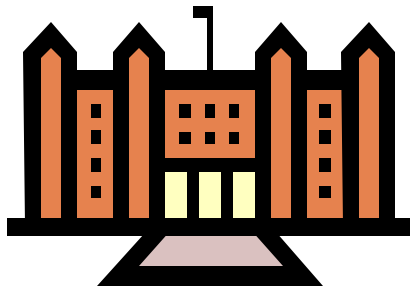
and surrounding tissues causing pain, stiffness and a decrease in mobility. The most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis. Arthritis is not just a normal part of aging. While much is still not understood about the disease, it is believed that some forms of arthritis could be prevented through weight control, occupational and

sports injury prevention, and prevention of tick bites that cause Lyme disease and associated arthritis.

The Baldwin Center offers a “Sittercise” program developed specifically for those who suffer from arthritis or other conditions that limit mobility. Call 385-4050 for more information.

Stratford Health Department Moves to Birdseye Building

The Stratford Health Department is now comfortably settled on the 3rd floor of the newly renovated Birdseye Municipal Building, located at 468 Birdseye Street on the #10 bus line. Our Public Health Nursing division, which was formerly located at the Baldwin Senior Center, has also moved to this new location.



DIRECT SERVICES

- Counseling on communicable diseases
- Health education, screenings and referrals
- Health fairs
- Immunizations
- Investigation of resident complaints
- Medication management
- Sale of radon home testing kits
- School dental clinics
- Smoking cessation clinics
- Testing of ticks for Lyme disease
- Testing of animals for rabies
- Throat cultures
- Wooster Middle School Health Center

OFFICES

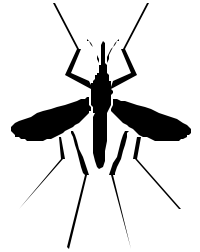
Open to the public
Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Stratford Health Department
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Mosquito and Tick Borne Diseases

West Nile virus, caused by the bite of an infected mosquito, can cause encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain. This past summer, some mosquitos that were trapped in Stratford were found to be infected with both West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus, another potentially more serious mosquito borne disease. While these viruses were detected in mosquitos, no Stratford residents became ill and only 6 Connecticut residents were diagnosed with West Nile fever. The risk of contracting West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis is still considered to be low; however, residents should take precautions to prevent mosquito bites during the summer months.



Lyme disease, caused by the bite of an infected deer tick, currently poses an even greater risk to Stratford residents than West Nile virus. In 2000, there were 3,773 cases of Lyme disease in Connecticut and 35 cases in Stratford. Lyme disease is often misdiagnosed, and if it is not treated in its early stages, the disease can cause chronic cognitive problems, arthritis, and inflammation of the spinal cord and brain.

Our survey found that over 80% of residents took at least one of the following measures recommended by the Stratford Health Department to protect themselves from West Nile virus and Lyme disease:

- Removed standing water from around the home
- Used a larvicide such as BTI around the home
- Avoided outdoor activities at dusk
- Wore long-sleeved shirts and long pants
- Used insect repellent containing DEET on skin and clothes
- Scanned skin and clothes for ticks

By engaging in all, not just one, of the above protective activities, residents will reduce their risk of contracting West Nile virus, Lyme disease, and a host of other mosquito and tick borne diseases.

Top 5 Personal and Community Health Concerns

What do you consider to be the biggest threat to your health which causes you the most worry?

1. Heart disease
2. Cancer
3. Smoking
4. Stress
5. Old age

What do you consider to be the biggest health-related problem in your community?

1. Pollution
2. Cancer
3. Drugs/alcohol
4. West Nile virus
5. Smoking