

## **Health Before Pregnancy Backgrounder**

### **Background**

Most people know that prenatal care is important in improving healthy pregnancy outcomes. But prenatal care often begins too late in pregnancy to prevent adverse results. Many Canadians wait until a positive test confirms a pregnancy before they make changes to their overall health and lifestyle. But babies begin to grow even before women know they are pregnant. This means that the time to prepare for a baby's health is before a woman gets pregnant. There are things that both **men and women** can do to improve the health of their future children.

Many people think that planning for a healthy baby simply means that the mother-to-be should quit smoking and stop drinking. While these lifestyle changes are important to both the health of the mother and unborn baby, they are not the only things that need to be considered. The father's health and lifestyle choices also play a critical role – in both in getting pregnant and in preparing for the healthy outcome of the pregnancy.

Things like family history, environmental hazards, stress, nutrition, physical activity, alcohol, smoking, drugs, caffeine and sexually transmitted infections can impact a pregnancy by affecting factors including the quality of a male's sperm, a female's overall health and the health of the fetus during critical stages of development.

### **About the Health Before Pregnancy Campaign**

Best Start is committed to promoting health in men and women prior to pregnancy and is launching a provincial awareness campaign in early 2005 to help those who are planning a pregnancy. The provincial awareness campaign will aim to inform men and women about health before pregnancy through mass media advertising, posters, brochures and a web site. Best Start is committed to working with community health agencies to provide them with the resources required to support this provincial campaign on a local level.

While nearly half of all pregnancies in Canada are unplanned, this campaign is *not* intended to reach these individuals. These pregnancies are likely to have higher risks, due to a range of factors, and will not likely benefit from the information provided through this campaign.

### **About Best Start Resource Centre**

Best Start: Ontario's Maternal, Newborn and Early Child Development Resource Centre supports service providers across the province of Ontario working on health promotion initiatives to enhance the health of expectant and new parents, newborns and young children.

The Best Start Resource Centre provides consultation, training, information and resources. It works to share effective practices and research on maternal and newborn health promotion through its newsletter and website. The Resource Centre produces unique maternal, newborn and child health resources, including posters, brochures, manuals and an e-bulletin to help service providers with both program planning and program delivery.

Best Start is a key program of the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (OPC) and is funded by the Ontario government.

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