November is here, winter is in the air and so is the influenza (flu) virus. The good news is that you and your family can take steps to avoid the flu and some of the other nasty viruses that will be circulating this fall and winter. Check out our first two articles for more information.

If there is one thing in life that is for certain - it's change. Change, whether good or bad, can be difficult for toddlers. Our third article has some tips to help you help your child adjust.

If you haven’t tested your home for radon gas - now is the time! Cooler November temperatures mean homes are sealed up tight and radon levels can rise. Don't know what radon is? No worries - you can learn more in our final article.

**BE A FLU FIGHTER**

Flu season is upon us. Getting a flu shot and washing your hands frequently are the two most effective ways to protect yourself from the flu (influenza).

Many people incorrectly use the term “flu” to refer to any illness caused by a virus, such as the stomach flu or the common cold. However, influenza is often more serious. Influenza reduces the body’s ability to fight illnesses and infections and it can also increase a person's risk for developing other serious conditions, including viral or bacterial pneumonia.
The flu vaccine is free for:

- All children 6-59 months of age and their household contacts
- Caregivers of infants and children age 0-59 months
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy during flu season and their household contacts
- Anyone who will be visiting a health-care facility (e.g., hospital, public health centre, residential care facility)
- And more…

Children under six months of age are not ready to receive the flu vaccine. Family members and caregivers can help protect these little ones by getting themselves vaccinated and washing their hands frequently.

Free flu clinics start this month. Visit our website to learn more about this year’s flu shot and to find a clinic near you.

**TIPS TO KEEP THE WHOLE FAMILY HEALTHY**

Getting a flu shot helps protect you and your family from influenza but it won’t protect you from other viruses that cause colds or the stomach flu. In addition to getting a flu shot, hand washing is one of the most effective ways to stay healthy.

You can prevent viruses from spreading by washing your hands after:

- coughing, sneezing or wiping your nose
- being in contact with someone who is ill
- wiping your child’s nose

Additional tips include:

- Keep babies away from people who have a cold or flu, whenever possible.
- Teach children to cover their nose and mouth with tissues when they sneeze or cough or to cough into their sleeve or elbow.
- Avoid sharing toys that kids place in their mouths until the toys have been cleaned.
- Avoid sharing cups, utensils, or towels until they have been washed.
- Make sure your child receives all of the recommended vaccines.

More information on colds and flus can be found here.
Even though Shrek might say “change is good donkey” most of us have a hard time adjusting and it can be even more difficult for toddlers.

Regular routines and familiarity make toddlers feel safe. When changes happen your toddler may show you how they feel through their behaviour. The following may be signs your toddler is struggling with change:

- loss of appetite
- crying
- nightmares or sleep problems
- outbursts of anger or temper tantrums
- clingy behaviour
- being very quiet or withdrawn
- going back to old habits (thumb sucking, wearing diapers)

Change can be positive or negative and it can be expected or unexpected. It is important to remember that even changes that may be positive and expected, such as a new baby, can be hard for your toddler. No matter what the change is you can help your toddler adjust by showing him he is loved and will always be taken care.

Here are a few more tips:

- If the change is expected, talk to your child about the change that is coming in a positive way.
- Listen to your toddler’s concerns about the change and reassure.
- If the change is upsetting and you are crying, tell your child that you are upset right now, but you will feel better soon.
- Make sure you tell your child the change is not his fault.
- Monitor how your toddler is adjusting.

If you want to learn more check out Toddler’s First Steps (page 118-122). There is a lot of more information there about helping children cope with specific changes, such as a new baby, death of a loved one or pet, or a family breakup.
HAVE YOU TESTED YOUR HOME FOR RADON?

Radon gas, the second leading cause of lung cancer, is a naturally occurring gas found in the ground throughout the world. Most homes that contact the ground will contain some amount of radon gas - it becomes a concern when it reaches high levels. If high levels of radon are found, basic measures can be taken to address the problem.

Radon gas is colourless, odourless, and tasteless, so the only way to know if the radon levels in your home are high is to test. The best time to test your home for radon gas is now through April.

Testing a home is easy and inexpensive. Testing involves placing a small puck-like kit in the lowest area of the home that could be occupied for more than four hours per day. The kit should remain in that location for a minimum of three months and then mailed to a lab for results. Test kits are available from BC Lung Association - order online at www.radonaware.ca or call 1-800-665-LUNG (5864). More information on radon can be found on the Interior Health website.

Sources and where to get more information

Interior Health - Search for Health Centres under "location type"
Interior Health
HealthLinkBC
ImmunizeBC
Radon Aware
Toddler's First Steps

This e-newsletter is an Interior Health project to provide quick and easy health tips for new parents and caregivers of children ages 0 to 2 years. Your comments and topic suggestions are welcome! Simply email us at: healthmatters@interiorhealth.ca.

For more info or to attend a free child health clinic, contact your local Public Health Centre. You can find contact info online at: www.interiorhealth.ca or look it up under Interior Health in the blue pages of your local phone book.

Sincerely,
Interior Health Authority