

The unique risks and vulnerabilities of children

A number of factors point toward the need for these workshops. As public awareness about issues of children's environmental health rise (i.e. issues like leaded jewellery, mercury in fish, rising levels of brominated flame retardants in breast milk), the level of knowledge and skill of service providers to address these issues must also rise.

Focusing on those who provide front-line support is the best way to protect the most vulnerable members of our society — our children.

- There is a growing body of scientific knowledge on children's environment and health that is not reaching local practitioners.
- Children are exposed to hundreds of substances suspected of contributing to adverse health and developmental effects in the fetus and growing child.¹
- Children are more highly exposed and more vulnerable to toxic chemicals than adults.²
- Reproductive and development disorders, learning and behavioural problems, respiratory disorders, cancer, and other chronic conditions are associated with some toxic exposures.³
- 26% of Canadian children aged 6 to 11 years have learning or behavioural problems.⁴
- 3% of neurobehavioural disorders are caused directly by toxic environmental exposures and an additional 25% by interactions between environmental factors (defined broadly) and genetic susceptibility of individual children.⁵ As the science emerges, this number grows.
- Health Canada reported that in 1997, 12% or one million children in Canada have asthma – four times more than were affected 20 years ago.⁶
- Knowledge, attitude and behaviour change among parents, caregivers, service providers and decision-makers can significantly reduce children's exposure to toxic substances.
- Children's environmental health is not included in the curricula of most medical schools and training programs of early childhood educators. It is only minimally represented in continuing education and other professional development.

¹ Toronto Public Health, McKeown, D. (September 2005) *Environmental Threats to Children – Understanding the Risks, Enabling Prevention*. pp. 24-32

² Toronto Public Health, McKeown, D. (September 2005) *Environmental Threats to Children – Understanding the Risks, Enabling Prevention*. pp. 24-32

³ CPCHE, Kathleen Cooper (August 2005) *Child Health and Environment – A Primer* pp.33-57.

⁴ National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth as reported in CPCHE, Kathleen Cooper (August 2005) *Child Health and Environment – A Primer* p.39

⁵ U.S. National Academy of Sciences Committee on Developmental Toxicity. (2000) *Scientific Frontiers in Developmental Toxicity and Risk Assessment*, Washington, DC. National Academy Press.

⁶ Health Canada (1999) as reported in CPCHE, Kathleen Cooper (August 2005) *Child Health and Environment – A Primer* p.39