



Serious health risks rising due to urban sprawl

Family physicians give advice on how to avoid dangerous health issues when living in the suburbs

TORONTO – October 27, 2005 – The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP), with special guest Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion in Ontario, today launched a public education campaign providing tips to Ontarians on how to avoid the serious health problems which can occur when living in the suburbs.

“Moving to the suburbs doesn’t necessarily mean you’re moving to a sanctuary from the stresses of life,” says Dr. Riina Bray, Chair of the Environmental Health Committee of the OCFP and a physician at Sunnybrook and Women’s College Health Sciences Centre. “Urban sprawl can pose significant health risks to a person’s physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. Ontarians need to take precautions if living in or considering a move to suburban areas.”

In January 2005, the OCFP released a research review on urban sprawl. Their findings demonstrated that suburban areas have a higher incidence of cardiovascular and lung diseases including asthma in children, cancer, obesity, diabetes, traffic injuries and deaths. The report concluded that air pollution, gridlock, added traffic accidents, lack of physical activity and negative social impacts such as road rage, lead to a variety of these health problems.

In follow-up to the report, the OCFP is now launching a public education campaign to heighten awareness of the issue and to teach Ontarians the necessary steps they should take to avoid these health hazards. Some of their tips include – *if you’re contemplating a move to the suburbs, choose a community where you:*

- *Can walk to work, stores, schools, parks, restaurants, places of worship, and social gathering spots and therefore, reduce the need to drive.*
- *Have pedestrian paths and bike lanes so you can easily continue your daily physical activity.*
- *Have efficient public transportation systems that run frequently and on time offering alternatives to driving.*
- *Have parks and wildlife areas to help clean and cool the air.*

“When Premier McGuinty created the new Ministry of Health Promotion, the goal was to work closely with our health partners to deliver programs that help Ontarians lead healthier lives,” says Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion in Ontario. “The OCFP’s public education campaign promotes healthy choices and lifestyles for Ontarians who live in the suburbs.”

The OCFP’s public education campaign includes the distribution of four brochures to public health departments and to family physicians (especially those working in southern Ontario) to share with their patients.

The brochures provide in-depth information on:

- How urban sprawl contributes to air pollution, traffic injuries and deaths, obesity, and social and mental health issues;
- Why these are such threats to the public’s health; and
- The steps you can take to try to prevent these serious health threats if living in or considering a move to the suburbs.

The brochures, plus additional information and tips, also are available on the OCFP web site (www.ocfp.on.ca).

“Educating Ontarians about the precautions they can take to prevent poor health outcomes caused by urban sprawl is a very important step,” says Jan Kasperski, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario College of Family Physicians. “It also is important for governments to develop and implement strategies to control sprawling growth and to plan for safe and healthy communities. How we build our communities has a direct impact on the health of our citizens.”

The Ontario College of Family Physicians is a provincial chapter of the College of Family Physicians of Canada and is a voluntary, not-for-profit association that promotes family medicine in Ontario through leadership, education and advocacy. The OCFP represents more than 7,200 family physicians providing care for remote, rural, suburban, urban and inner-city populations in Ontario. The OCFP is the voice of family medicine in Ontario. At the heart of the organization is the building and maintenance of high standards of practice and the continuous improvement of access to quality family practice services for all residents of Ontario.

-30-

For more information:

Jennifer Casey, Environics Communications, 416-969-2724

Jan Kasperski, Ontario College of Family Physicians, 416-867-9646