



# COMMUNITY-BASED INJURY SURVEILLANCE

Keeping Track : Looking at Injuries and How They Can be Prevented

## INJURIES ARE PREVENTABLE

Accidents happen, people get hurt and we see the results in our communities - burns, broken arms, cuts, bruises and worse. After hearing about them we often say, "Well that could have been prevented if.....!" But how do we prevent accidents, don't they "just happen by chance?" They do happen - but most of them happen for a reason. Communities need to know the reasons why injuries occur, recognize potential harmful circumstances and take action to lessen the chance of more injuries happening. How do we do this? Learning more about injuries is the first step to reducing the risk of accidents and injuries in your community. To learn you need information. Gathering information means communities need to keep track of what accidents and injuries are happening. A good way to do this is through Community-Based Injury Surveillance.

## WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED INJURY SURVEILLANCE?

Injury surveillance means collecting written information about injury events or accidents in your community. It is an "information gathering system" intended to keep track of what, who, when, where and how, whenever an injury occurs. Community-based injury surveillance simply means gathering this information for use in the community. Why would you need injury information? Because reliable information can help communities identify and prevent injuries.



## HOW CAN INJURY SURVEILLANCE HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?

Injury Surveillance will give you data that allows your community to take action on injury prevention. Here are a few facts to consider:

**Injury surveillance can reduce injury and harm to people in your community by allowing you to identify, understand and prevent injury problems in your community.**

Communities can prevent continuing and similar injury events by identifying and understanding situations that lead to accidents and injuries. Injury surveillance will give you the information you need to decide what strategies will work best in your community and what people and resources are needed to make prevention strategies work. Over time injury surveillance can help reduce injury and harm to people in your community

**Injury surveillance information will help you evaluate how useful injury prevention activities are in your community**

Injury surveillance information, over time, gives you a tool to measure how helpful injury prevention activities are in your community. You can compare where you started with where you've been. Most importantly,

injury surveillance can tell you which direction you should be going. Is your prevention strategy making a difference? Has our injury situation changed for the better? Are we reaching the right people? Good evaluation makes good decision-making easier. Injury surveillance can help you identify as well as prioritize injury problems, helping your community to focus on the most pressing issues.

**Injury surveillance helps to look at injury problems in an objective way.**

When data is collected in the same way with regular procedures, the information is more accurate and reliable. This creates a standard way of collecting the information. If procedures are in place and followed it doesn't matter who collects the information. The facts will be noted the same way even if different people are recording them. Most importantly, your information won't depend on people's memories about events that have already happened. Collecting information in a consistent way also gives you a realistic picture of your community's injury problems. This can overcome misleading impressions about injury problems. You need to know the facts, not someone's guess, to effectively handle a problem.

**Injury surveillance data is useful in funding proposals.**

Funding proposals that use data to prove specific community needs tend to receive more attention from funding agencies. Proposals that use reliable data are more likely to be successful since it is obvious money is being given to help deal with clearly identified problems.

**Injury surveillance develops skills.**

Injury surveillance requires people to work with information, train others in data collection procedures, hold team meetings, share information in a user-friendly way and undertake program planning, implementation and evaluation. These are valuable skills that are an asset to your community and to you personally since this expertise can be used in other fields.





**Injury surveillance gives you helpful information about your community.**

Injury surveillance is collected by community people. This provides a focus on local needs and a focal point for people to take action on your community's injury problems. Good information gained and shared creates awareness and encourages community members and service providers to take action on injury prevention and education.

## HOW DOES INJURY SURVEILLANCE WORK?

There are four related parts to injury surveillance.

**1♦ Collecting Injury Information** - People will say many things about an accident in the community. Usually the exact details get stretched as the story makes its rounds. Taking action to prevent accidents and injuries requires accurate and reliable information. The most useful and important information to collect will tell you the following: Who is being injured, When injuries are occurring, Where injuries are occurring, What injuries are occurring, How the injury event or accident happened. Ideally, people in your community and those who provide services to your community can collect the information.

**2♦ Analyzing the Information** - Once injury information is collected it must be analyzed. This is similar to working on a picture puzzle. The more pieces you have in place, the easier it is to see the big picture - an injury picture for your community. This comes from finding patterns in the information. For example, by looking at 100 injury events over the past year you may find that 60 of the 100 injuries happened to toddlers under the age of 3. This is an injury pattern. By taking a closer look at the 60 injuries, you may find that 30 of the injuries are burn injuries in children less than 3 years old. This would be another injury pattern.



**3♦ Interpreting and Understanding Information** - It is very important to understand why injuries are happening! Looking at the causes of injuries helps us understand why injuries are happening. In the example given above, a closer look at the information about the children who experienced burn injuries, may show that these injuries happened when hot water was being prepared and involved mostly young parents or elderly care givers. Having good information helps us focus on specific age groups and specific injury problems. Understanding who is most affected by injury and how events happen helps guide injury prevention and safety promotion activities.



**4♦ Getting Information to People in Your Community** - People who have information are more aware of injury problems. People who are aware and concerned have more reason to

become involved in promoting safety and living safely. Getting information to community people is usually overlooked, but it is often the most important part of injury surveillance. In our example, knowing the injury pattern - children suffering burn injuries when hot water was being-prepared in the home, under the care of young parents or the elderly - allows community workers to take action in a number of ways. In the area of public information/education they could put messages on child and home safety in the community newsletter, information flyers or community radio. These messages could target young parents or the elderly. Workers could conduct home visits to ensure proper use of stoves, kettles or positioning of child playpens or play areas in the kitchen as a helpful intervention. Having all the facts provides motivation for community members to become involved. A team could be formed to ensure that accident and injury prevention activities continue in the community. Good information helps promote action and brings people together to develop solutions to injury problems.



## HOW CAN A COMMUNITY GET STARTED?

Likely your community already has a good start. Look at information already being collected. For example, if your community has an ambulance service or nursing station, you may want to check whether important information on injuries has already been gathered and documented. Can you answer the following questions with the information that you have available?

WHO is being injured in your community? WHEN are the injuries happening? WHERE are the injuries occurring? WHAT kinds of injuries are experienced? HOW do the injuries happen? Does the information help you understand WHY injuries are happening? Do you think that the information identifies most of the injuries happening in your community?

If you can answer these questions, your community already has a good start on implementing community-based injury surveillance. Your next step is putting this information together in a report. Now you are ready to share the information with key people to determine how accurately it describes the injury events in your

community. If everyone agrees the data is reliable and factual you can then examine the information to find any significant injury patterns or problem areas. With this knowledge in hand you can begin to plan prevention activities that address problem areas.

If the information you collect cannot answer these questions there are other options. The First Nations and Inuit Health Information System (FNIHIS), is a computer-based program, which assists communities to collect health information. FNIHIS managers are working on adding an 'injury module' to the system tentatively scheduled for community use in November 2002. The module is based on community testing done in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Communities using the system own their data and handle their information as they choose. Confidentiality is protected by specific procedures, such as allowing only specific individuals chosen by the community to handle information, confidentiality agreements, and individual security codes. Contact information for the FNIHIS project is Andrew Dingley at Health Canada, e-mail [Andrew\\_Dingley@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:Andrew_Dingley@hc-sc.gc.ca)

## Community-Based Injury Surveillance

### Keeping Track : Looking at Injuries and How They Can be Prevented

For more information on Community-Based Injury Surveillance contact:

Karin Johnson

phone: (613) 954-2463 or fax: (613) 941-8904

e-mail: [Karin\\_Johnson@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:Karin_Johnson@hc-sc.gc.ca)

Community Health Programs

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch

Health Canada

Ottawa

K1A 0L3

To obtain additional copies,  
please contact:  
Tel.: (613) 952-2117

This document is available on the  
Health Canada web site:  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb/dgspni/fnihb/chp/lpc](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihb/dgspni/fnihb/chp/lpc)

© Minister of Public Works and  
Government Services Canada, 2002

ᐃᓐᓐ ᐃᓐᓐ ᐃᓐᓐ ᐃᓐᓐ ᐃᓐᓐ ᐃᓐᓐ

Également disponible en français  
sous le titre Surveillance des  
blessures au sein de la collectivité  
et en Inuktitut

Contents may not be reproduced for  
commercial purposes, but any other  
reproduction, with acknowledgement,  
is encouraged.