

## Public Health is assessing nutrition of junior and senior kindergarten students

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph is tackling the problem of poor nutrition in young children. Poor nutrition has the potential to cause immediate effects on the health of children including their success at school. For this reason, Public Health is looking closely at the nutrition status of children in Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph who attend junior or senior kindergarten in the Upper Grand District School Board and Wellington Catholic District School Board.

Public Health is using a screening tool called NutriSTEP which was developed and scientifically validated by researchers at the University of Guelph. "The screening tool will identify approximately 10 to 15 percent of children as high-risk for nutrition-related problems," said U of G researcher Janis Randall Simpson. "It assesses eating habits and nutrition-related problems in children through a series of questions about food and nutrient intake, physical growth and development, physical activity and sedentary behaviour, food security and the feeding environment."

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommends the use of the NutriSTEP screening tool by public health units and healthcare providers in the province of Ontario.

"Children experiencing poor nutrition are at risk for growth, behaviour and development problems," said Dr. Mercer, Medical Officer of Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. "By screening children for nutrition programs at an early age, children can be referred to appropriate healthcare professionals and community programs." The health unit will use the data it collects from this initiative to reduce health inequities, guide its decision making and allocate resources in the community.

Public Health is urging parents of kindergarten students to complete the NutriSTEP questionnaire when it comes home from school in March. Parents with questions about their child's health and nutrition can call Public Health's KIDS LINE at 1-800-265-7293 ext. 3616.