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THE RED FLAGS GUIDE

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 13, 2005, from the Commissioner of Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and Regional Council receive this report and the *Red Flags, A Quick Reference Guide for Early Years Professionals, Early Identification in York Region for Infant, Toddler and Preschool Children* for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and Regional Council about the importance of early identification of children at risk of not meeting health and/or developmental milestones, and how the *Red Flags* guide will assist early years professionals in achieving early and appropriate referrals for assessment, treatment and intervention.

3. BACKGROUND

In 1998, the early childhood screening component of the *Healthy Babies Healthy Children* program was developed through a community consultation process. This process resulted in the adoption of the Nipissing District Developmental Screens (NDDS) as the early childhood screening tool for use in York Region. The NDDS is an informal surveillance tool designed to help parents identify children who may be having problems achieving developmental milestones. If more than one developmental milestone is not met by a certain age, then it is considered a “red flag” and the child should be referred for additional advice, formal assessment and/or treatment.

The *Red Flags* guide was adapted from a document developed by the Simcoe County Early Intervention Council in March 2003, *Red Flags – Let’s Grow With Your Child*. This document was revised in 2003–2004 by the York Region Early Identification Planning Network (YREIPN), a collaborative cross-sectoral community planning table that formed in 1999 to act as the implementation working group for the *Healthy Babies Healthy Children* Early Identification/Early Childhood Screening initiative. The York Region Health Services Department provided leadership and support for this project.

The Red Flags sub-committee included representation from the Child and Family Health Division, Dental, Nutrition and School Services Division, as well as the York Region District School Board, York Catholic District School Board, Simcoe-York District Health Council, Blue Hills Child and Family Centre, Markham Stouffville Hospital Preschool Speech Language Program and York Region Early Intervention Services. The content for the guide was drawn from research and experts in the field. The guide was reviewed by a York Region family physician and two developmental paediatricians.

3.1 The Importance of Early Childhood Identification

Children can become “at risk” for poor developmental outcomes at any time across the developmental continuum. If early identification initiatives (screening and assessment) are successful, children can develop learning capacity, coping skills and enhanced health. Children identified at risk can receive intervention prior to compulsory school age and monitoring children enables the school system to predict trends and anticipate resource demands.

Screening is the first step in identifying families who may need *Healthy Babies Healthy Children* services or other services in the community. Screening is a short, simple easy-to-administer process that is universal or population-based, that is, it is used with all infants and families. The goal of screening is to identify children who may be at risk and may benefit from a more formal assessment, treatment and/or intervention.

The *Red Flags* guide is designed to assist professionals to make earlier and consistently appropriate referrals for at risk children in York Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The main objectives of the YREIPN are to design a comprehensive system of monitoring healthy child development and early risk identification for children between the ages of birth and six years, to increase awareness of the value of healthy child development and the family support services that emphasize family well-being and to support children potentially at risk with early referrals to appropriate intervention services in a timely, effective manner.

Red Flags is a quick reference guide intended for use by any professional working with young children and their families. The guide outlines a range of functional indicators or domains commonly used to monitor healthy child development, as well as potential problem areas. The guide describes community programs and services available to at risk children and advises early years’ professionals where to refer families for assistance and support.

YREIPN is working on developing a comprehensive plan for early childhood screening and for the training and distribution of the *Red Flags* guide. To date, an action plan for universal screening has been developed and implementation is well underway. More than 2,400 copies of the guide are in circulation and over 300 professionals have received

training on the importance of early childhood screening, the NDDS and the *Red Flags* guide. A copy of the guide was sent to all York Region family physicians and paediatricians compliments of the *Healthy Babies Healthy Children* program. The *Red Flags* guide is also accessible on the York Region website.

The response to *Red Flags* has been very positive and there have been several requests from community partners for training and access to the guide. The York Region Human Services Planning Coalition has also been informed of this initiative and has requested a number of copies for review.

For 2005, YREIPN continues to promote the *Red Flags* guide through train-the-trainer workshops and presentations at conferences for early years providers. As York Region's population grows and children are identified earlier than in the past, the demand for service capacity is expected to increase.

4.1 Relationship to Vision 2026

The *Red Flags* guide contributes to the Vision 2026 goal of "Quality Communities for a Diverse Population" by being responsive to the needs of vulnerable residents, responding to children in need and involving and investing in our youth.

It also supports the goal of "Responding to the Needs of Our Residents" by enabling access to services that aid in early child development, supporting health care needs of families and children, promoting social and emotional well-being, encouraging healthy lifestyles and building relationships with public-sector and private-sector partners to provide services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In 2004, the cost to print the Red Flags document was shared among the contributing partners. York Region Health Services share was \$2,500 to print 900 copies for distribution to York Region family physicians, paediatricians and staff. A train-the-trainer package was also developed for use in workshops for early years providers. The costs for this initiative were 100% provincially funded through the *Healthy Babies*

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities will benefit from the early identification of children at risk of not meeting health and/or developmental milestones. Early identification can assist local councils, recreation departments, libraries, hospitals, schools, community programs and services in identifying service gaps and planning priorities for at risk children in their communities. Children identified early will have a better chance of achieving their optimum potential.

7. CONCLUSION

The importance of the early years in the development of children is well established. The *Red Flags* guide will assist early years professionals with early identification of children at risk of not meeting health and/or developmental milestones and with referrals for additional advice, formal assessment and/or treatment.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.