



## Ontario joins prenatal HIV-screening movement

Ontario joined ranks with 7 other provinces and territories last month when it announced a program of universal prenatal HIV counselling and voluntary testing. The announcement was made on World AIDS Day, Dec. 1. However, some experts are concerned that the province has made little effort to inform doctors about the tests, which can be done only with a pregnant woman's informed consent.

"Doctors who have never really thought about HIV often know very little about it, and are uncomfortable — we've seen this a lot," says Dr. Susan King, a pediatrician and infectious disease specialist at Toronto's

Hospital for Sick Children. She thinks it will take obstetricians in some communities "quite a while to become comfortable" enough to discuss the tests with patients. An information package of brochures for patients and guidelines for doctors was not available when Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer announced the program.

British Columbia, the first province to act, launched its program in 1994, and King is pleased that Ontario has finally taken the same step. "We're still picking up kids who were infected as infants. We just had a 3-year-old referred to us. If we'd had a program in '95, that might have been prevented."

Ontario's standard prenatal laboratory test forms are being revised to include the HIV test and doctors will be required to tick a box indicating that pretest counselling was done. If a test is ordered, a second box specifying that informed consent was obtained must also be ticked.

The province expects that about 150 000 prenatal HIV tests — roughly equal to the number of expected births — will be performed annually at a cost of about \$775 000. Previously, only about 12% of pregnant women were tested for HIV in Ontario. King says the provincial

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## BC's "heartsmart" walking paths first of many?

A 10-km route in West Vancouver is Canada's first "heartsmart" walking path, thanks to the new Hearts in Motion initiative launched by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of British Columbia and Yukon.



Dr. Brian O'Connor: a beautiful walk

Hearts in Motion is part of an international program called *Sli na Slainte* — "pathway to health" — that originated in Ireland in 1996 and now covers 200 km in that country. The program has since spread to about 10 countries, mostly in Europe. Denmark has established the most trails — 36 in less than 2 years. In Canada, Prince Edward Island is planning to open 6 routes, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation expects other provinces to follow. Existing community pathways are used to reduce costs. They are marked at 1-km intervals with the *Sli na Slainte* logo so walkers can track their progress.

On the West Vancouver route, which was developed with help from the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the District of West Vancouver, Heart and Stroke

Foundation kiosks at each end of the trail provide maps and cardiac health information.

Dr. Brian O'Connor, the foundation president and medical health officer for Vancouver's North Shore, hopes the trail markers will encourage people to get exercise on what he calls "one of the most beautiful walking routes in Canada." The scenery may well distract walkers from their sore feet. The 10-km walk begins in the forests and mountains of the Capilano River regional park and ends on the West Vancouver seawall with its expansive view.

The use of the pathways is already being evaluated in Ireland. In West Vancouver, the Angus Reid group is polling North Shore residents to determine the trail's success. — © Heather Kent