

Health

CHIRPP program will benefit kids

There's a new program operating at Canadian children's hospitals these days that's going to help find some reasons for many unexplained deaths - and also point the way to avoiding deaths or injuries in the future.

It's called the Children's Hospital Injury Research and Prevention Program, or CHIRPP for short, and it has been set up by the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control at Health and Welfare Canada, in collaboration with Canada's 10 children's hospitals.

Childhood injury is a serious problem in Canada, more serious than most people realize. In fact, injury is the number one killer of Canadian children; it is the cause of approximately half of the fatalities of people under the age of nineteen. Around 2,000 children die each year from their injuries, and at least 250,000 are seen in emergency departments. Of these injured kids, 50,000 or more are admitted to hospital.

What can be done about this? Emergency departments and rehabilitation services respond to these injuries "as they happen", but obviously this doesn't help cut down the number of accidents. What is needed is more complete information about how, where and why injuries occur, and that's where CHIRPP comes in.

By monitoring the emergency departments of children's hospitals across the country, this program is gathering important data to point to the causes and circumstances of childhood injuries. With this kind of information, programs to promote prevention and safety can be developed, to show people what kinds of situations and behaviours cause injuries, and how they can be avoided.

Research on the problem of childhood injuries in Canada has, in the past, consisted of in-

dividual studies done by various organizations. With CHIRPP, the compilation of data from all over will result in a more complete and representative picture, a record of the entire country. Once this information is collected and analyzed, it should be possible to have a clear idea of how to guard against injuries.

The CHIRPP system is based on a highly successful survey system of the same type in Australia, called the Australian National Injury Surveillance Unit. The Australian system surveys all accidents: in Canada, the focus is on children.

When someone brings a child or adolescent into a children's hospital with an injury, they are asked to fill out a questionnaire about the injury and the circumstances surrounding it. They also write details about the injured individual and the doctors fill in some medical information. Each hospital collects all the information about injured children that it treats.

Periodically, this information - with the children's names removed for the sake of privacy - is sent to the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control in Ottawa. There, it is put in a computer database with information from the other participating hospitals.

The preliminary stage of CHIRPP will run for three years, during which time information sent in will be gathered and collated so as to understand the whys and wherefores of childhood injury. When all of these injury reports are studied, the aim is to pick out trends and patterns in the injuries, and identify hazards to children.

All of the information that CHIRPP compiles will help us to assess the risks surrounding childhood injury. We should then be better able to manage these risks through legislation, prevention and education programs.

Flu season approaches

The Canadian winter is nearly here and that heralds the beginning of the flu season. Familiar symptoms of fever, chills, weakness, loss of appetite and aching limbs may be signals that influenza has struck. The treatment of taking to your bed, drinking plenty of fluids and generally pampering yourself is usually enough to get you well again within a week. Your staying at home protects your friends from catching the virus when you sneeze and cough.

For some people, however, there can be complications. When the body is weakened by a bout of

flu, defences are lowered and other infections can occur. In elderly people, and those who are already coping with an existing disease, the body's normal defenses may not be adequate for the fight.

If you are a person who may be seriously affected by influenza, now is the time to check with your local family physician for that annual flu shot.

For further information contact: Lynda Brant, Communicable Disease Program Supervisor, Halton Regional Health Department, 338-7100, ext. 535.

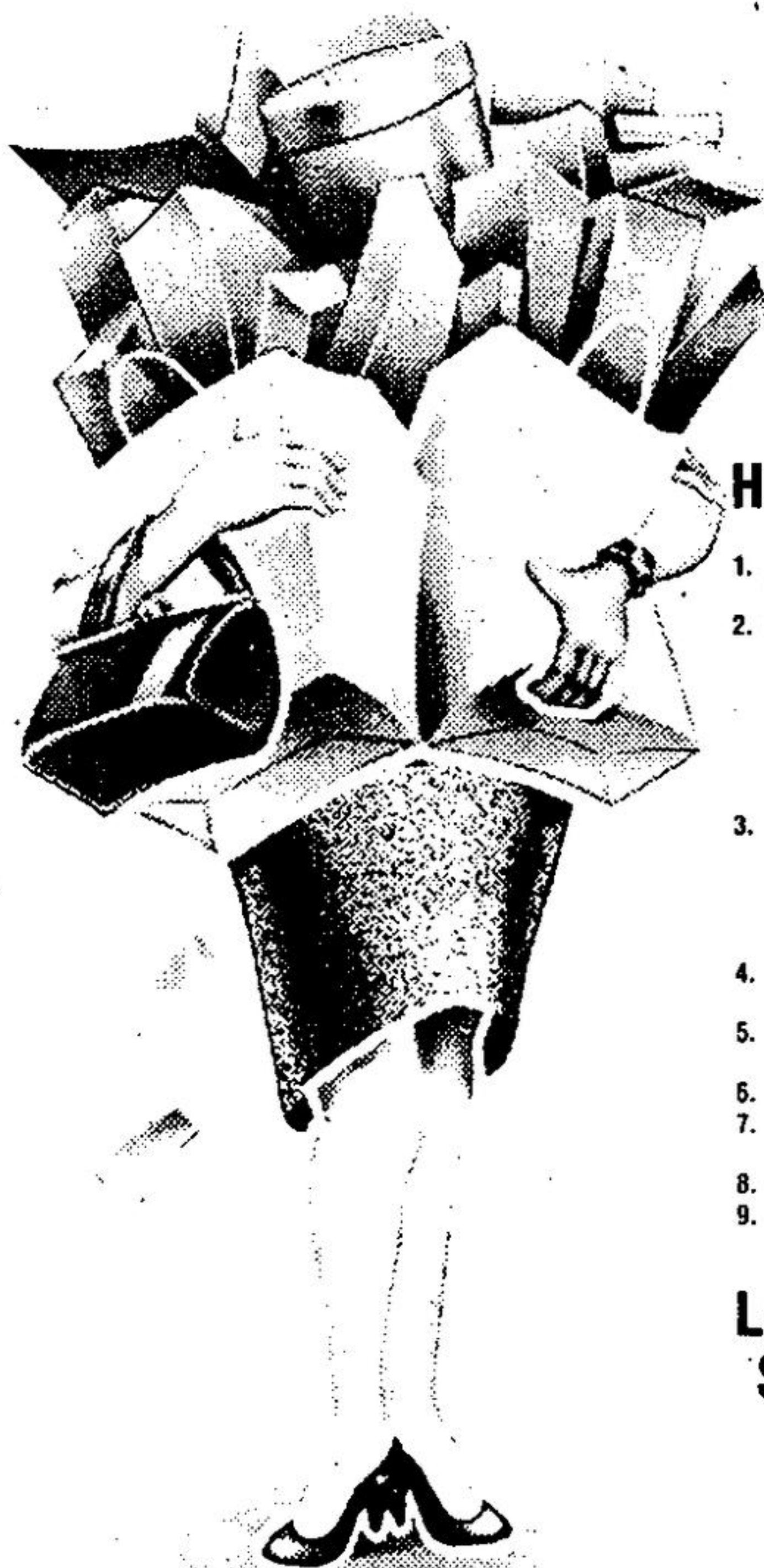
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