

MEDICAL  
BRIEFS

## Flu vaccine

The first days of fall may be balmy and bright, but flu season is just around the corner. Doctors at Livonia Urgent Care urge seniors and those with chronic medical problems to get their flu vaccination early since vaccine manufacturers are releasing their supplies slowly.

"We only have 500 doses at this time. It is especially important for seniors to get their vaccination, especially if they have a history of chronic medical problems. We are seeing occasional cases of the flu already," said Dr. Mohammed Arsiwala, medical director.

Livonia Urgent Care is located in the Mission Health Building, Seven Mile Road and Newburgh, Livonia. Call (734) 542-6100. The vaccine cost is covered by Medicare.

## Eye exams for children

It's estimated that 80 percent of all learning during a child's first 12 years comes through vision; yet, nearly 86 percent of children age five and under - that's 18 million - have not had a complete eye examination, according to the Contact Lens Council.

Statistics bear out the need for complete eye examinations for school-age children. Vision disorders have been ranked as the number one condition handicapping children, with around 5 percent of children identified as having visual acuity problems.

"Children can be easily mislabeled as 'poor learners,' when, in actuality, they may simply have a visual problem," says Dr. Stuart R. Dankner, a pediatric ophthalmologist in Baltimore, Maryland. He cites two conditions most frequently overlooked without proper vision screening: *amblyopia* and *focusing problems*. "Both conditions can affect how well a child learns," he cautions.

For more information on contact lenses, call 1-800-884-4CLC or visit [www.contactlenscouncil.org](http://www.contactlenscouncil.org).

## Yellow jacket plague

Yellow jacket populations are reaching epidemic numbers in some parts of the United States this fall, says Miles Guralnick, president and chief entomologist at Vespa Laboratories, Inc., a manufacturer of stinging insect venoms used for allergy vaccines.

"As each nest reaches its peak population, food supplies are dwindling causing them to scavenge in exposed food areas such as picnics and garbage cans. Yellow jackets also typically nest in the ground, which puts them in a direct line of fire with your lawnmower. This close contact with our outdoor activities is why so many people are stung in the fall," he said.

The following tips may prevent stings:

- Wear light-colored, non-floral patterned clothing that covers all exposed skin.

- Wear shoes and socks at all times.
- Do not wear scented products such as perfume when outdoors.

- Cover all food and drinks when eating outdoors, especially beverage cans.

- Be cautious around garbage cans and pools of water.

- Remain calm when approached by an insect. Do not swat or flail at it.
- Have problem nests professionally exterminated.

If you are stung and experiencing troubled breathing or fainting - or any symptoms OTHER THAN pain, itching, redness and swelling at the sting site - you may be having an allergic reaction. Seek medical attention immediately. An allergic reaction puts you at higher risk the next time you're stung.

For insect sting allergic individuals, the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology recommends seeing an allergist, who can evaluate you for a vaccination program. For a free informational booklet, call 1-800-23-STING.

## We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Databook (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointment/new hires in the medical field) and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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# Massage

away pregnancy pain



BY ALICE ASHMORE  
STAFF WRITER

Three Plymouth massage therapists bring welcome relief to the aches and pains that accompany pregnancy. The Center for Therapeutic Massage began providing pregnancy massage for their clients 18 months ago.

The therapists use a specially designed Preggo Pillow that allows expectant moms to lie on their stomach and feel almost weightless.

"I feel so light, I don't even feel pregnant," said Jeralyne Feasel of Canton, after a massage in her eighth month of pregnancy. "It is really comfortable. I am amazed at how different I feel when I get off the table. The feeling stays with me two or three days."

Feasel, a client of therapist Kirsten Heffernan, a co-owner in the practice, said she had tried massage while lying on her side during a previous pregnancy. "It was a complete waste of money and time. Having the right equipment - the Preggo pillow - makes all the difference."

She said the pillow takes all the weight and pressure off of her slender frame. She continued massage throughout her pregnancy and delivered a healthy baby last January.

"Everybody should try it. A lot of pregnant women may be afraid, but it makes an incredible difference. I feel a lot more stress free and a lot less anxious," Feasel said.

## Relieves pain

"We got the Preggo pillow when one of my regular clients became pregnant," said Heidi Barrows, a partner in the Center for Therapeutic Massage. "She came every week for pain management."

That client, Renee Kochanek, delivered her first child - a healthy baby boy named Liam - almost a year ago. "I had been going to Heidi for several years, and I wasn't willing to give it up when I got pregnant."

Previously, Kochanek had used massage therapy to relieve the demands of a stressful job. Her pregnancy brought a different kind of pressure.

"The baby was putting pressure on everything!" she said.

Pregnancy definitely puts additional pressure on the spine and muscles of the back, said Dr. Noyan

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-Jeralyne Feasel

Canton

Bartlett of Comprehensive Obstetrics and Gynecology, Botsford General Hospital. Many women develop a backward-leaning pregnancy gait to compensate.

"The curvature of your back and your posture is affected in order to accommodate the increased weight in front. When the stomach muscles are stretched, we lose that support internally, so the back must compensate," said Bartlett.

A good massage can help relieve that pressure, she added. "Massage is beneficial in that it helps to stretch the muscles and relax them so that they don't spasm."

Massage also helped Kochanek cope with an entrapped nerve that developed during her pregnancy. "I could barely sit - it would bring tears to my eyes. Massage eased that pain."

Feasel, a professional dance instructor, said massage therapy relieved her aching hips. "It really helped alleviate sciatic pain that became worse when I was pregnant."

Heffernan said pregnancy massage also provides relief from swollen ankles - also known as edema, another common ailment during pregnancy.

"The mom's body is giving so much to the baby - it is nice to have someone give something back to them. Plus, it is good for the baby. It gets more oxygen flowing."

## Physician's okay

"A lot of people don't know that you can get a massage while you are pregnant," Feasel said. The 29-year old said she did consult her obstetrician before beginning massage therapy while pregnant.

Bartlett said she's not read any medical studies on the effects of massage during pregnancy; however, she believes most pregnant women - except those at risk for pre-term labor - would be eligible for massage. She recommends a woman consult her physician before choosing a masseuse used to giving pregnancy massages.

Bartlett, who had her third baby in January, said her husband gave her massages during her pregnancy. "He pretty much knows all the right spots," she said.

Kochanek continued her massage therapy after giving birth.

"I really have found that it is one of those things that no one else can do for you except your massage therapist. It means so much to me that I have this thing that is just for me."

She credits massage therapy with reducing the number of colds and sinus infections she used to suffer. "It releases all those toxins."

Kochanek credits massage therapy for mental benefits, too. "It really helped me relax that hour and-a-half that I was with her."

## Credentials

Nelko holds a master's degree in social work as well as her massage certification. She sees the benefits of massage for everyone. "One thing that I feel really strongly about is that massage is less of a self-indulgence than it is a preventative measure. It is part of overall self-care."

Heffernan said massage therapy is shedding what was once a questionable reputation. "I think the biggest misconception is that we are not legitimate. It's like we are some lady with a cart selling rattlesnake oil."

She said of massage therapy, "Trying is believing. Once people try it, they will understand what massage therapy can do."

The Center for Therapeutic Massage was the first massage therapy center to be licensed by the city of Plymouth. All three therapists are certified and trained in all areas of massage, including pregnancy massage. Between them, they have completed more 4,600 hours of instruction in massage therapy.

"Continuing education is a priority for us," Heffernan said.

They employ a number of techniques in their work, including Swedish massage, Touch for Health, myofascial release, trigger point therapy and acupressure, polarity and energy work, injury rehabilitation and sports massage.

"We tailor the massage according to the client's needs - no one receives the same massage," Barrows said.

Pregnancy massage is just a small part of The Center for Therapeutic Massage's practice. A large portion its clientele seeks relief from arthritis, fibromyalgia, migraines, TMJ, muscle strain, low back pain and other ailments.

"Eighty percent of our clients come to us for pain management," said Barrows.



Comforting: Massage therapists Ann Nelko, Heidi Barrows and Kirsten Heffernan demonstrate the Preggo pillow in one of the massage therapy rooms.