

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

**CONTACT: SUSAN TOLCHIN
MARY LANDRIGAN**

**(914) 995-2932
(914) 813-5013
(914) 813-5000 (After Hours)**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2004

**COUNTY EXECUTIVE SPANO TALKS THE TALK AND WALKS THE WALK TO
CELEBRATE PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK**

Board of Health's "Distinguished Public Health Service" Award also to be presented

Westchester County Executive Andy Spano will lead the annual 30 minute Power Walk around White Plains on Thursday, April 8, noon to 1 p.m., to celebrate National Public Health Week in Westchester, April 5 – April 11. The walk begins with today's press conference that highlights ways residents can stay healthy and fit. During the press conference, Board of Health Chairman Douglas G. Aspros, D.V.M., will present the 2004 Distinguished Public Service Award to the Board of Legislators for their vision in preserving public health during a difficult budget year.

"Sometimes the simplest things in life are the most effective," said Spano. "Washing your hands, eating a healthy snack and going for a walk are three things people can start doing today to improve their health immediately. Carry what you start today through the spring and into the summer by walking the trails of our county parks. After a brisk half-hour walk, treat yourself to a low-fat granola bar and bottle of water."

"In addition to taking this opportunity to encourage Westchester residents to make healthy choices for themselves, National Public Health Week is also a good time to recognize the efforts of those who work tirelessly to protect the health of the public," said Spano. "Thanks in great part to their efforts, the health and well-being of all our residents is enhanced."

MORE

The Distinguished Public Health Service Award was established two years ago by the Board of Health to acknowledge the contributions made by individuals and organizations who promote public health in Westchester. This year's award goes to the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

“The best public health efforts are often invisible,” stated Douglas G. Aspros, D.V.M., Board of Health Chairman. “When public health does its job, bad things just don’t happen. We thank and applaud the members of the Westchester County Board of Legislators for understanding, recognizing and protecting our mission, and for their confidence in us to get the job done. We hope we can continue to earn that support.”

“Eating healthy and exercising are more important than ever as obesity becomes close to overtaking tobacco use as the number one cause of death in the United States,” stated Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H. “And handwashing is the single most important thing a person can do to prevent getting sick.”

While 94% of Americans say they wash their hands after using the bathroom in a recent survey, observations in public restrooms indicate only about 68% do.

The correct way to wash your hands:

- 1) First wet your hands and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Keep the bar soap on a rack that allows it to drain.
- 2) Next rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces.
- 3) Continue for 20 seconds. Tell kids to wash as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice. It is soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.
- 4) Rinse well and dry your hands.

In support of National Public Health Week, Spano reminds residents how vital public health is to our safety and well-being. “The Westchester County Department of Health provides a wide variety of public health services to preserve, protect and promote the health of all county residents,” said Spano. “Public health staff monitor and ensure the safety of the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink. They work tirelessly to identify and address patterns of disease and illness in our communities. They teach prevention strategies and control the spread of vector-borne diseases such as West Nile virus, tickborne diseases and rabies.

MORE

They play a crucial role in monitoring and surveying conditions at the Indian Point facilities. I could go on all day citing the scope of important services that the Health Department provides on a daily basis,” he added.

County Executive Spano also urges residents to take advantage of county programs available through the Department of Health. They include services such as:

- Immunizations; HIV counseling and testing; tuberculosis screening and education; and clinics for family planning, pediatric dental care, and sexually transmitted diseases;
- Low-cost mammograms and free breast examinations, as well as screenings for cervical cancer and colorectal cancer;
- Vouchers for free rabies immunizations to assist residents with having their dogs and cats vaccinated;
- Nutrition services, which provide nutritious foods, advice and health care referrals to low-income women, infants and children up to the age of five;
- A storehouse of information on health matters available from the division of Health Education and Information;
- Services for children with special needs through the Department's Early Intervention Program, Preschool Educational Advocacy Program, and a program for children with special health care needs.

For additional information about National Public Health Week or County Health Department services, residents can call (914) 813-5000, or visit the Health Department’s website at www.westchestergov.com/health. For more information on county parks and walking trails, residents can call (914) 864-7000 or visit the Parks Department’s website at www.westchestergov.com/parks.