

## Public health achievements include decreases in preventable disease

**D**ECLINES IN vaccine-preventable diseases and fewer deaths from motor vehicle crashes are among the great public health achievements of the first decade of the 21st century, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Published in the May 20 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, the 10 great public health achievements of 2001–2010 were in the areas of vaccine-preventable and infectious diseases, chronic diseases, motor vehicle safety, tobacco control, maternal and infant health, cardiovascular disease prevention, occupational safety, cancer prevention, childhood lead poisoning prevention and public health preparedness and response.

“Americans are living longer, healthier and more productive lives than ever before thanks in part to extraordinary achievements in public health over the past decade,” said CDC

Director Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH. “However, we can do much more to protect and promote health.”

Advances cited in the study included a 30 percent reduction from 2001–2010 in reported U.S. tuberculosis cases and a 58 percent drop from 2001–2009 in central line-associated bloodstream infections. In tobacco control, the number of states with comprehensive smoke-free laws grew from zero in 2000 to 25 states and the District of Columbia in 2010, according to the study.

And while heart disease and stroke are still among the nation’s leading killers, deaths from both causes have declined over the past decade. The study linked the decline to lower smoking rates as well as improvements in medications, treatment and quality of care.

Read the full study at [www.cdc.gov/mmwr](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr). ■

— Donya Currie

## USDA unveils new MyPlate meal icon to replace food pyramid

**T**O GIVE Americans an easier way to make healthy food choices, federal officials unveiled the new MyPlate icon emphasizing the fruit, vegetable, grains, protein and dairy food groups.

Released in early June, the icon “is a quick, simple reminder for all of us to be more mindful of the foods that we’re eating,” first lady Michelle Obama said at a news conference.

The MyPlate icon shows a healthy meal should be made up of half a plate of fruits and vegetables paired with lean protein, grains and a side of dairy. The icon is featured at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov), which also includes a tip of the day.

The new icon replaces the food

pyramid as the federal government’s primary food group symbol and is based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Over the next several years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will work with Obama’s Let’s Move! initiative and both public and private partners to promote MyPlate and the [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov) website.

For more information, visit [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov) and [www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov). ■

— Donya Currie



## National coalition notes difficulty determining exposures

### Report calls for examination of chemical safety

**F**ROM CONSUMER products to industrial chemicals, Americans encounter thousands of chemicals each day. To protect the public from potentially harmful chemical exposures, a national health coalition in June released a landmark plan.

The plan, “Addressing Public Health and Chemical Exposures: An Action Agenda,” calls for addressing the issue from a range of perspectives, including prevention, monitoring, scientific understanding, education, workforce capacity and chemical emergencies.

“We simply do not know — as scientists, as regulators, as health professionals — the health impacts of the soup of chemicals to which we expose human beings and many other entities on this planet,” said Gail Shibley, JD, administrator of environmental public health for the Oregon Health Authority and a member of the initiative’s 27-member leadership council.

“We need to recognize that with 83,000 chemicals in commercial production and something like 20 trillion pounds being produced every year, we are indeed living an experiment, and we need to engage with everyone to identify and sharpen the issues and the questions and move now to address this at all levels,” Shibley said.

According to the plan, gathering sufficient data on chemical use, release and exposure is difficult, and understanding exposures is particularly challenging “given the large number of chemicals and variations in environmental mixtures.”

Developed by the National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures, the action agenda contains 48 recommendations for addressing public health and chemical exposures. The recommendations include protecting children’s health and promoting the substitution of hazardous chemicals with less toxic alternatives.

Phasing out and replacing hazardous chemicals and processes with safer alternatives is already

occurring, according to the report. Examples include changing processes to eliminate the use of hexavalent chromium, and replacing the use of perchloroethylene in dry cleaning with wet-cleaning or other processes.

People are exposed at varying degrees to chemicals throughout the life cycle of the chemicals — from the chemical’s extraction to its manufacture and finally to its recycling or disposal, according to the action agenda. But despite decades of public health protection achievements, significant gaps exist in the nation’s understanding of chemicals and health, according to the initiative’s leaders, who see the new action agenda as an opportunity to build an overdue system for protecting the public from harmful chemical exposures.

APHA member Nsudu Witherspoon, MPH, told *The Nation’s Health* that Americans “need and want protection” from chemical exposures.

“The action agenda also recognizes that there is currently no comprehensive national system in place for dealing with chemical exposures, and then it sets out to create such a national system by the various recommendations that are thoughtfully provided and suggested throughout the action agenda,” said Witherspoon, co-chair of the National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures Leadership Council, which developed the report with input from health supporters in communities across the country.

Council members hail from state, local and tribal government, industry, academia and nongovernmental organizations, and include APHA Associate



Photo courtesy iStockphoto

*In an effort to limit exposure, some dry cleaners are phasing out their use of chemicals such as perchloroethylene.*

Executive Director Susan Polan, PhD.

Launched in 2009 with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the national initiative featured Web dialogues, community conversations and public comment opportunities encouraging public participation at key points throughout the process.

About 85 percent of the initiative’s participants were “concerned citizens,” said APHA member Henry Anderson, MD, co-chair of the initiative’s Leadership Council.

“I view it as community empowerment,” Anderson, chief medical officer for environmental and occupational health at the Wisconsin Division of Public Health, told *The Nation’s Health*. “It really was a grassroots and community approach.”

The effort was “hugely overdue,” Shibley said.

“We can’t undo the past,” Shibley said, “but we have an opportunity, and I believe an obligation, to create the future that we want and that we know can be the healthiest possible for our children and future generations.”

For more information or to download the action agenda, visit [www.nationalconversation.us](http://www.nationalconversation.us). ■

— Teddi Dineley Johnson