

Writing a News Release

When writing a news release it is important to do the following things:

- Hook the media person right at the beginning. Unlike a “novel” or “story,” where the whole idea is to keep your reader in suspense until the end, a news release tells the last line of your story first.
- Grab media interest with a catchy headline.
- Tell your story in the most concise way possible, be specific with statistics – but just mention the strongest ones.
- Be sure to provide answers to who, what, why, when and where.
- Let the media know the dates and times of events and be sure they have proper contact information in case they have questions.
- Use 1.5 spaces between lines so that it is easier to read.
- If you can include a quote from a spokesperson or expert, do so. It adds credibility.
- Always finish your release by placing the symbol “– 30 –” centered below the last line of text but above the boilerplate (i.e., the standard description of your organization). This signifies that your communication is over and the recipient has received all the information.
- If you have more than one page in your news release, put a .../2 at the bottom of the first page to signify that you have another page to come. This will ensure that nothing gets mixed up at the other end of a printer or fax machine.

Quick Tips

You can write a news release in advance of an event (to encourage media coverage and public awareness), concurrent with an event (to make sure that key points are highlighted), or following an event (to inform the public of what happened).

When you send your news release, be sure to include a personal message like, “Thought your readers might be interested in this story.”

If you are hoping to set up an interview, supply a “Question & Answer” sheet to pique the interest of the editor or radio personality. This will also show them that you are offering an interview opportunity they can take part in without a lot of research.

Sample News Release

For Immediate Release

Folic Acid Reduces Risk of Birth Defects

Women encouraged to take daily multivitamin with folic acid

Toronto, Ontario – May 12, 2011 – Women can significantly reduce their risk of having babies with birth defects by taking folic acid before getting pregnant.

Essential for the healthy development of a baby's spine, brain and skull, if taken prior to conception, folic acid can reduce the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect (NTD) by as much as 70 per cent. To be effective, this B vitamin must be taken prior to conception because NTDs occur in the first four weeks of pregnancy – before most women even know they are pregnant. Since close to half of all pregnancies are unplanned, it is important for all women who can become pregnant to take a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 0.4 mg of folic acid.

Recent research conducted by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of the Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) found only 42 per cent of Ontario women between the ages of 18 and 40 know that folic acid may help prevent a child from being born with spina bifida or other neural tube defect (NTD); only 38 per cent of those women know that folic acid must be taken before getting pregnant in order to prevent birth defects; and only 43 per cent are currently taking a multivitamin.

A provincial folic acid public education and awareness campaign will launch again in June as part of Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Awareness Month. Local community groups are already jumping on board to help spread the word about folic acid in their communities.

On Tuesday, May 31, 7 p.m., a free community kickoff event will take place in Mississauga at the Noel Ryan Auditorium in the Central Library at 301 Burnhamthorpe Road West. Susan Jones, a spokesperson from the community who has a child with spina bifida, will be sharing her story. Information will be distributed and there will be a raffle to win a year's supply of multivitamins.

"We are really excited about the activity at the local level," says George Smith of the Mississauga Health Centre, the group running a series of events this June in support of folic acid awareness. "The

best way to get people talking is through word of mouth in the community. Once people understand the value of folic acid in preventing neural tube defects, we have no doubt many more children and their families will be spared unnecessary suffering. Prevention is the key.”

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The Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario (SB&H) has been committed to making a positive difference in the lives of individuals with spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus for more than 37 years. Part of that commitment includes supporting research and prevention efforts designed to reduce and ultimately eliminate the risk of children being born with spina bifida. For more information, visit www.folicacid.ca and www.sbhao.on.ca.

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