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KEEPING ATHLETES SAFE – FOCUS OF NEW CAMPAIGN

WHITEHORSE – With the Canada Winter Games opening in Whitehorse on Friday, Feb. 24, the Department of Health and Social Services is launching a new awareness campaign aimed at supporting athletes and Yukoners to stay safe, both on and off the field of play.

“*Play Safe, Play Hard* is the Health Promotion Unit’s injury prevention campaign which promotes the use of protective gear. It doesn’t matter whether you are a competitive athlete or a recreational athlete, when it comes to protective gear, the message is ‘Same Game, Same Gear’,” Community Health Programs Director Paula Pasquali said.

The campaign features Team Yukon Canada Winter Game snowboarders, hockey players and downhill skiers, paired with kids who just love the sport and participate at a recreational level. “Given Yukoners’ love of snowmobiling, the campaign also features two competitive snowmobilers wearing protective equipment,” Pasquali added.

The department has paired the injury prevention campaign with a sexual health education campaign that takes the same message and turns it slightly to promote safer sex. *Play Hard, Play Safe* is the off-field message in a campaign that features a specially designed set of six specially packaged condoms, which play on words associated with Canada Winter Games’ sports. This campaign builds on the condom campaign that Health Promotion has been running for the past two years.

The condoms are available to all athletes and at select locations around town. In addition, the Health Promotion unit has created a magazine, *freestylin’*, that puts honest, straight-shooting messages out to young people about protecting themselves and their friends. Based on a harm-reduction approach, the magazine supports safer sex, safer partying, injury prevention, and healthy decision-making.

The final piece of the campaign is an invitation to Canada Winter Games athletes to develop their own health promoting messages by producing and posting a two-minute video clip on a specially designated site on YouTube. Athletes who produce the three most effective and creative ads will receive gift certificates at one of five online stores.

“Cell phones with video capabilities and camcorders allow us to pilot new ways of engaging young people in promoting health and capturing their creativity – we are eager to see what the uptake will be,” Pasquali added. “Our ultimate message to young people is that you can have fun, and stay healthy and safe too.”

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