The GGDs in the Netherlands
(in random order)

Community health services in the Netherlands
What a community health service does

Everybody has heard of the GGD - the community health service. But what service does it provide? Local community health services are responsible for preventive health care. They keep an eye on health risks to all people residing in the Netherlands and try to improve people's health. This means that the community health services focus their attention on preventing people from becoming ill and having to see a general practitioner or go to a hospital.

'To prevent is better than to cure' is the community health services' motto. This folder gives information about the activities of community health services in the Netherlands.
Community health services

The name GGD, community health service, is for many a familiar name. Some may think of the school doctor, or vaccinations for holidays in far-away countries. Others may think of an anonymous HIV test, or the ambulance service. The Netherlands has 40 local community health services scattered all over the country. The community health services will help all 16 million citizens in the Netherlands, in all provinces, districts, cities, communities and streets. They aim at preventing health risks and advancing the health of all citizens. That includes your health!

The name of GGD

What does the name of GGD stand for? The answer is not always obvious because several meanings have been given to the abbreviation. GGD is short for: Gemeentelijke GezondheidsDienst; Community Health Service. However, the G in 'Gemeentelijk' is also used for 'Gewestelijk' (regional), or 'Gemeenschappelijk' (communal). The cities of Utrecht and Amsterdam have the name GG&GD, the third 'G' in this name refers to 'Geneeskundige' (medical). Moreover, there are GGDs that closely co-operate with other regional institutions, such as the fire department. Together they present themselves as 'emergency assistance services'.
The (basic) tasks of the community health services

All Dutch municipalities have the task to protect, control and promote the health of their inhabitants. To carry out these tasks, the municipalities have a community health service. There are almost 500 municipalities in the Netherlands and they are responsible for 40 community health services. This means that one community health service is often directed by several municipalities jointly. The tasks of the community health services are not always identical since every municipality gives its own assignments to the GGD, specified in the municipal memoranda about local policy on community health. Nevertheless, all Dutch community health services have a number of uniform tasks. These tasks are specified in the law: the Public Health Act (Wcpv). Every GGD is required to carry out at least the tasks described in this act.

In brief, the tasks of the community health services are:

- Child health care
- Environmental health
- Socio-medical advice
- Periodic sanitary inspections
- Public health for asylum seekers
- Medical screening
- Epidemiology
- Health education
- Community mental health
- Communicable disease control

VACCINATING 3,500,000 CHILDREN

In 2002, the community health services jointly vaccinated 3.5 million children against meningococcae C. This major logistic operation had to be carried out as the meningococcal disease was spreading, making more and more victims. As the vaccine against the meningococcal disease was available, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports decided that all children should have this vaccination. This year, child health centres will start vaccinating all newborn babies.
Community health services for asylum seekers (MOA)
Since 2000, the community health services are responsible for initial preventive medical care for asylum seekers. To implement this task, they formed foundations that are focussed on mainstream preventive measures, which include monitoring, protecting and improving the health and well-being of asylum seekers that are being accommodated in the refugee centers.

The organisation of health care is complex, especially for people who have not always lived in the Netherlands. The MOA foundations act as intermediaries and ensure that the asylum seeker can see the right care provider, usually the general practitioner. The MOA employs social physicians, nurses and administrative staff. The MOA national service office, incorporated into GGD Nederland, provides policy support for implementing preventive health care for asylum seekers.

National Co-ordination Centre for Communicable Diseases (LCI)
All community health services are engaged in the prevention of infectious and contagious diseases. For this purpose, physicians and social nurses from the communicable diseases department use national protocols and scenarios drawn up by the National Co-ordination Centre for Communicable Diseases, shortened to LCI. The LCI is a collaboration of institutions working in the field of preventing and combating infectious and contagious diseases. The LCI was founded by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports in 1995. The LCI bureau gives support to all of LCI’s tasks and activities. This bureau is located at GGD Nederland.

Medical Assistance at Accidents and Disasters (GHOR)
The Netherlands is divided into 25 safety regions. Each region has a regional medical director of disaster management (RGF) who is responsible for medical assistance in case of accidents and disasters (GHOR). The RGF is usually also the director of a GGD, and co-ordinates medical assistance in case of major incidents with many casualties and deployment of several emergency services. To be well prepared for disasters, the medical officer makes sure that preparations are made. This includes drawing up plans and protocols, taking care of adequate training of the relief workers involved, and fine-tuning the co-operation with the various emergency services, such as medical services, fire department, police and municipalities. National support of the medical officers is facilitated by GGD Nederland.

GGD Nederland
GGD Nederland is the national association of all community health services. All Dutch community health services are members of the association. The GGD Nederland Institution is located in Utrecht and has over ninety staff members. They co-ordinate national projects for all community health services, draw up protocols and guidelines and see to it that the community health services exchange knowledge and expertise, and they support the community health services with advice and assistance. Besides the above mentioned national bureaus, there is one bureau to support all the regular tasks of the community health services: the bureau for Collective Prevention. On behalf of the community health services, GGD Nederland is an important counterpart of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, and the Association of Dutch Municipalities, and strives hard to promote the interests of all community health services, including yours.
EVERY MUNICIPALITY HAS A PLAN
Traditionally, municipalities have been responsible for community health care: for the prevention of diseases and the protection and advancement of the health of all citizens. Every municipality is required to describe in a memorandum how to implement its local health policy for a period of four years. The GGDs, as municipal organisation for community health services, are usually advisors on drawing up this policy. The GGDs also take care of implementing large sections of this policy. Any citizen can ask his or her municipality for the memorandum that specifies the plans for community health care.

GGD's staff
The community health services in the Netherlands have a staff of 7,000 in total, which includes about 1,000 employees working for the MOA preventive health services for asylum seekers. A GGD may include doctors for youth care, social and health care, health instructors, epidemiologists, medical environmental experts, TB nurses, administrative staff, inspector nursery, STD nurses (Sexually Transmittable Disease), specialists in contagious and infectious diseases, ambulance drivers, researchers, and a director and staff executives.
Other GGD activities
A random selection from GGDs’ activities: periodic medical examination • vaccination of nine-year-olds against e.g. diphtheria, tetanus and polio • exchanging hypodermic needles • forensic care for prisoners • STD/AIDS surveillance • inspection of hygienic conditions at day-care centres • vaccinations for travellers, care and treatment of addicts • co-ordination of breast cancer screening for women aged between 50 and 75 • ambulance services • preventive health care for asylum seekers • autopsy • prevention of unhealthy behaviour such as smoking • advice to municipalities on the local health policy • providing methadone to addicted detainees • assistance to illegal foreign drug users • cervical cancer screening • providing methadone • giving information and advice to citizens and authorities about the effects of environmental aspects in their immediate area • containing TB (tuberculosis) • screening asylum seekers • sex education • Mecca consultation (vaccinating pilgrims) • consultations for the young • research on the ability to cope on one’s own • anonymous HIV tests • medical sports advice • organising informative meetings for the non-native elderly in mosques and meeting places • assistance and accommodation in case of serious (house) pollution • source and contact investigation of infectious diseases such as meningococcal • medical assistance at accidents and disasters • etc.

Further information? If you require further information about the work the GGD does, please visit our site www.ggd.nl. This site gives access to GGD Kennisnet where GGDs share their knowledge and expertise, and exchange information. www.ggd.nl also gives access to the website of the community health service in a specific region.