

# Health MATTERS

August 2010

Become a “locavore”

## Buy local, fresh food

*Think bringing home a basket of plump, locally grown tomatoes or berries from a nearby farmer’s market is just a summer taste treat? Think again!*



Vegetables and fruit are good for you. However, not many people in Simcoe Muskoka are eating the number of servings of fruit and vegetables recommended in Canada’s Food Guide, so there is ample room to include more in our daily meals and snacks.

We can also increase the good those fruits and vegetables do by buying fresh, locally grown produce. Local produce may pack more nutrients because heat and light-sensitive vitamins like A and C tend to break down when foods are transported or stored for any length of time.

### It’s kinder to the environment

Carrots, potatoes and apples are often grown nearby. Buying local means reducing our reliance on outside food sources. The result is less fuel burned and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

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### How do I buy local?

“Locavore” is a new term to describe people who make local foods their first choice. Consider the following ways to develop this habit.

- ◆ Get to know your Simcoe Muskoka food producers by visiting a local farmer’s market. Take your family on an outing to local farms that sell fresh produce and ask farmers about their products. You can also buy direct “at the farm gate.”
- ◆ When in the grocery store, check where the fruits and vegetables come from. You may be surprised. What you thought was “home grown” may actually come from far away. Speak up and let grocery store managers know you’d prefer local produce.
- ◆ When dining out, let restaurant managers know that menus featuring locally grown vegetables, fruit and other foods will get your repeat business.
- ◆ Try growing some of your own food in your back yard or in a community garden.
- ◆ Lend your support to community activities that celebrate local food and food producers.
- ◆ Encourage the use of local foods for workplace meetings, school food programs and other volunteer events you take part in.

For more information about local food, food artisans and farmer’s markets, go to [www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca](http://www.simcoecountyfarmfresh.ca) or [www.savourmuskoka.ca](http://www.savourmuskoka.ca). Local Simcoe and Muskoka food maps and information are also available from libraries, tourism outlets, health unit offices and many local businesses. You can also check [www.foodland.gov.on.ca](http://www.foodland.gov.on.ca) for more information about locally grown food in Ontario.



# Driving skills gone to pot?

*Mention the phrase “impaired driving” and most people would automatically think of drinking and driving.*

## Drive Sober

Alcohol impairment accounts for a large number of the injuries and deaths on our roads. The consequences of mixing alcohol and driving are well known and have been the topic of public education campaigns for many years.

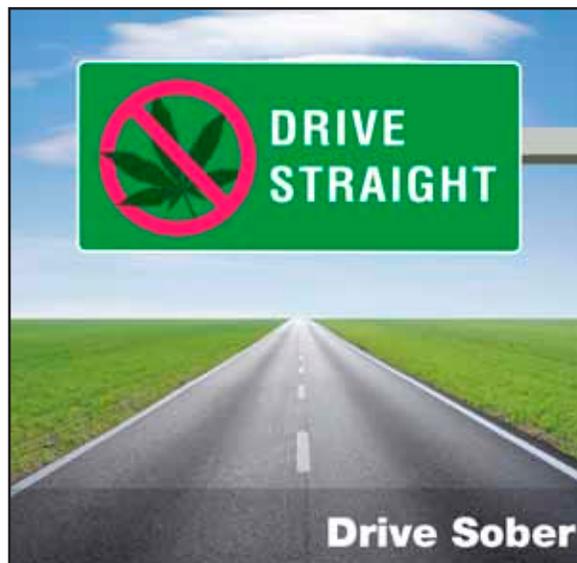
Other, less well-known factors also impair a person’s driving skills. Driving requires coordination, concentration and the ability to process more than one thing at a time—and laws are now recognizing the additional factors that could hamper these skills.

Marijuana, for one, will negatively affect driving skills. Marijuana has been largely ignored as a risk when driving. In fact, in addition to its negative health effects—which are significant—marijuana interferes with many of the tasks required to drive safely including:

- ◆ time perception
- ◆ motor coordination
- ◆ ability to respond quickly and
- ◆ ability to multi-task.

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in Canada and its use behind the wheel is becoming more frequent. Last year a survey showed about one in six drivers in Grades 10 to 12 (17%) in Ontario reported driving a vehicle within one hour of using cannabis. Yet the number of young people drinking and driving has dropped significantly since the late 1970s.

A common misconception is that there is less chance of being caught while driving impaired by marijuana. In actual fact a roadside sobriety test assesses for impairment by anything; if alcohol is not detected, then the driver will be subjected to further testing for the presence of drugs.



## Drive Straight

Driving under the influence of marijuana is impaired driving and an offence under the Criminal Code. An examination of fatally-injured drivers in Canada between 2000 and 2006 revealed that almost 15 per cent of those tested were positive for marijuana. These are deaths that could have been prevented.

A person’s ability to drive safely can also be impaired by things other than drugs or alcohol. When you are behind the wheel, anything that competes with your attention will hamper your driving ability and increase your risk of being in a collision. Using hand-held devices has been illegal in

Ontario since October, 2009. Studies show drivers using cell phones are four times more likely to be in collisions.

Driving while fatigued is another risky practice. Often the actions of fatigued drivers are confused with those of drivers who have been drinking. The consequences can be just as fatal.

The message is clear—make sure your mind is alert, your body is not under the influence and “keep your eyes on the road, your hands upon the wheel.”



# MMR vaccine controversy finally put to rest

*Vaccines have become one of the world's most reliable tools in preventing diseases that have caused misery and deaths for centuries.*

Although rare in our area, measles, mumps and rubella are highly contagious diseases that continue to surface in all areas of the world. These diseases can be spread simply by a cough or sneeze. They can cause serious medical complications and even death.

Keeping a high level of vaccination in children across our communities and beyond is a critical factor in protection from disease. It cuts the risk of illness for any child. Children who are vaccinated also protect others who can't get vaccine because they are too young or have specific medical issues. Such children may be at greater risk of serious side effects should they acquire an infection.



Medical science continues to study vaccines and finds them to be very effective and safe. Yet there are many misleading stories floating around that could frighten parents into refusing to have their children immunized.

In 1998 a group of scientists led by Andrew Wakefield, a British medical specialist, created a domino effect of fear among parents around the world with research published in the renowned medical journal *The Lancet*.

Wakefield's research suggested a link between the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR) and children developing autism. Parents began to mistrust the science behind vaccines and decided to either postpone or refuse this vaccine. The tragic result was an increase in measles, mumps and rubella (German measles)—in many countries—as well as a misguided sense that vaccines were not safe. Wakefield's supporters, including Hollywood celebrities, helped reinforce the belief that MMR and autism were linked.

## Research disproved

But major flaws were identified in Wakefield's study. His research was partly funded by a lawyer representing a group of parents suing the makers of the MMR vaccine. He broke ethical rules: he paid children at his son's birthday party to give blood samples without informing their parents. His report called for the use of separated measles, mumps and rubella vaccines rather than the combined vaccine—then, just days before the report was released, he obtained patent rights to those very separated vaccines.

On February 2, 2010 *The Lancet* officially retracted Wakefield's research article. Wakefield has since lost his license to practise medicine in the United Kingdom.

Many years of scientific research followed the Wakefield study. They have found no causal link between the MMR vaccine and autism. Sadly this one very flawed study has created a difficult barrier for the medical world to break down. It may take years to repair any damage or mistrust that has resulted.

## Serious effects from disease

Delaying or refusing any vaccine puts a child at risk. The MMR vaccine is provided to children in two doses at 12 and 18 months of age. It's available through your family healthcare provider, or at health unit immunization clinics.

Parents should ask questions about their children's health. However, their answers need to come from reliable sources based on unbiased science.

*“Choosing to vaccinate your children is just as important as ensuring they wear a seatbelt or bicycle helmet, eat healthy foods and stay active.”*

Dr. Susan Surry, mother, pediatrician,  
Simcoe Muskoka Associate Medical Officer of Health



# Keeping your child on track at 18 months

*As a parent, you play an important role in your child's growth and development.*

When your child reaches 18 months of age, it is important to ask your healthcare provider for an "enhanced 18-month well-baby visit." It's part of a normal medical checkup but recently a provincial program enhanced the visit. It slots in a little more time for you and your healthcare provider to review your child's progress. The visit may include:

- ◆ monitoring your child's growth and development
- ◆ providing the 18-month immunizations
- ◆ discussing safety and nutrition
- ◆ addressing your concerns as a parent
- ◆ providing information about parenting and community programs that promote healthy child development and early learning.
- ◆ assessing parent-child interactions and family functioning
- ◆ making referrals to specialized community services for those children identified with potential problems and/or risks
- ◆ recommendation for follow-up visits at two, three and four years of age.

## Support for screening, referral

The Ontario Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Visit Initiative is supported by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth (MYCS), and Ontario College of Family Physicians. It helps your doctor or healthcare provider obtain broader screening and referral support for your 18-month-old.

For more information on the Ontario's Enhanced 18-Month Well-Baby Visit go to [www.children.gov.on.ca](http://www.children.gov.on.ca).

The 18-month visit is just one step along the way as you raise your child. There are new roles you will be taking on, but rest assured that help is never far away.

## Did you know?

You are required to let the health unit know about your child's vaccines during the school and daycare years. You can submit this information online at [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/ImmsOnline](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/ImmsOnline) or by calling Your Health Connection at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.

Let's Grow Screening Centres are places where you can have your child's development screened at any age throughout Simcoe and Muskoka. Call us at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 or see the health unit's website at [www.simcoemuskokahealth.org](http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org).

## What can you do to help your child's development stay on track?

By the 18-month mark a child typically has learned to walk and is learning to talk. You can help your toddler develop these skills.

- ✎ Read to your child every day.
- ✎ Talk to your child about their day using three or four-word sentences.
- ✎ Give your child the time and space to explore the world around him/her.
- ✎ Find safe activities for your child to practise climbing, walking, and jumping.
- ✎ Allow your child to help you with simple chores like putting away toys or finding items at the grocery store.
- ✎ Be consistent when setting routines and disciplining your child.
- ✎ Take your child to visit the dentist and the family doctor regularly.
- ✎ Have fun and play with your child!

