

Health MATTERS

June 2010

Broken bones can be avoided

We've all been there. You rush home at 5:00, scramble to get dinner on the table before rushing out again. Mid-chop of the carrots there is a scream and a cry outside.



You run out to find your seven-year-old lying on the sidewalk next to his skateboard, helmet and pads nowhere to be seen. A visit to the emergency department replaces dinner and the evening. How did this happen? Your child knew he should wear his helmet; you know he skateboards on the sidewalk; the street was quiet; there's never been a problem before; you knew you could see him and his friends from the kitchen window.

Throughout Simcoe Muskoka about 1,000 children a year are taken to hospital for what some would call normal childhood accidents. For five to nine-year-olds these injuries usually happen in our local playgrounds. They mainly involve broken arms and legs and head injuries but could include severe brain trauma with lifelong consequences.

LOOK AT ME! – Growing up so fast

Five to nine-year-olds love to stretch their physical limits, on bikes, skateboards — anywhere. Learning to use their strength and balance in new ways builds the skills required for future independence. Kids love to play, yet they regularly think they can do more than they are able to — and this is particularly true for boys. They do not see the danger in their actions and they forget safety rules when they are excited. They also often take their lead by watching older children or adults. These developmental changes put them at greater risk for injuries.

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PLAY WITH ME! – Keeping children safe

Learn how injuries occur

- ◆ Children love to play and challenge each other.
- ◆ Five to nine-year-olds are growing physically and socially. They may not have all the judgment skills to make good decisions.

Create safer places for children

- ◆ Check the area children are about to play in for safety.
- ◆ Use safety gear (helmets, pads, equipment) that fits your child. Make sure your child can put on the gear without help or knows how to ask for help.

Watch children closely

- ◆ Know where your children are playing at all times and make sure there is supervision.
- ◆ Stand by children when they are learning something new or climbing.
- ◆ Occasionally seeing or hearing is not enough to prevent all injuries, especially with five to nine-year-olds. Stay within reach of children playing in or near the water.

Create and follow safety rules

- ◆ Involve children in making family safety rules and help them understand why they are important.
- ◆ Make sure children follow the rules every time, every day.
- ◆ Follow the safety rules yourself. Children learn by watching the adults in their lives.

Enjoy the opportunity to play with your children. Kids are unpredictable; injuries don't have to be.



Tobacco-free sports and playing fields

A winning duo

As local youth head out onto the fields and pitches for the season, it's a great time for coaches, parents and organizations to get involved in making their teams tobacco free.

Why get involved? The answer is simple: tobacco and sports don't mix. Tobacco products hurt players' performance. It doesn't matter if they're being exposed to secondhand smoke, using chew tobacco or smoking.

When you make your sport tobacco free it means participants, spectators, coaches and leaders do not use any tobacco products while being part of any of the activities related to your organization. That includes keeping areas in and around the playing fields tobacco free.

Requiring participants and spectators to be tobacco free is not an attack on tobacco users, but rather limits where tobacco products are used. Tobacco-free sports not only give everyone a chance to perform at their best, they also contribute to the healthy development of youth, families and our local communities.

What better way to introduce children to the benefits of physical activity and play than by giving them a recreation area free of tobacco litter, where others in and around the area are positive role models?



So how can you help?

Organizations

You can create a tobacco-free policy and share it with your players, coaches, parents and municipalities. The health unit has a tool kit to help you with draft policies, player pledges and other support materials. You may also be eligible for a \$500 grant to help put it in place and promote it.

For details visit www.playlivebetobaccofree.ca.

Coaches

Talk to your players and explain to them that tobacco stops them from being the best they can be by slowing their reaction time, making them tire more easily and making it harder to breathe. Have players sign a tobacco-free pledge. Send home information for parents too, so they can protect and promote the health of their young athletes.

Parents

You are your children's strongest role model. If you use tobacco products, don't use them around your children. Keep the air free from secondhand smoke in the places they live and play. Support your team in their tobacco-free efforts by encouraging spectators and others to keep the areas where kids play free of tobacco. Talk to your local councillor about bylaws that keep parks and recreation areas tobacco free.

Community members

Whether or not you have young people involved in sports, you can help promote healthier communities by being a positive role model and by raising your voice in support of tobacco-free outdoor spaces for sports and recreation. Many local councils in this region have already passed bylaws keeping public outdoor spaces smoke free. If your local council hasn't passed a no smoking bylaw for outdoor spaces let your local politicians know it's time.

There's more help on the health unit's website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.



Halt the salt

Do you use less than a teaspoon of salt a day?

Although sodium is important for the human body, too much can increase blood pressure and lead to cardiovascular disease.

Sodium is quickly becoming a hot health topic for Canadian consumers. Sodium is found in table salt and is often added to foods as a preservative or to enhance flavour. However, too much salt intake can lead to high blood pressure (hypertension), which the World Health Organization estimates is the leading risk factor for death in the world.

The average Canadian eats more than 3,000 milligrams (mg) of sodium per day. That's more than double what's recommended for any age group and significantly higher than the upper limit most people can consume without compromising their health. According to Health Canada, that limit is 2,300 mg of sodium, or roughly one teaspoon of table salt.

It starts with children

Statistics Canada in 2004 found that even toddlers were taking in more than 1,900 mg of sodium a day, nearly double what is recommended for them. What's more, 90 per cent of children four to eight years old were actually exceeding the maximum recommended levels for adults.

It's not surprising that, thanks to sodium and other factors like inactivity, more and more Canadians are living with hypertension.

The culprit

Where is all of this sodium coming from? Salt added at the table and in cooking adds little to a person's daily sodium intake. The real culprits are pre-packaged and processed foods as well as food from restaurants, especially fast-food restaurants. Even the most conscientious consumer may find it difficult to control their sodium intake due to the vast amounts in Canadian food products.

Health Canada has taken notice. A Sodium Working Group has called for a variety of measures to get sodium down to healthy levels in our food.

Want to learn more about the Sodium Working Group?
Visit www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/index-eng.php.

You too can take action.

- ◆ Make lower-sodium food choices when grocery shopping or dining out. Use the Nutrition Facts table on food labels to buy lower-sodium foods.
- ◆ Ask stores to stock lower-sodium options, and ask for sodium information at restaurants.
- ◆ Cook from scratch using lower-sodium ingredients and eat more home cooked meals and snacks.
- ◆ Choose more fresh vegetables and fruit, which are naturally low in sodium yet packed with fibre, vitamins and other important nutrients.

Take this sodium quiz to help you get started

	T	F
Pizza, sandwiches, submarines, hamburgers and hotdogs are NOT a source of sodium in Canadian diets.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cutting back on salt added at the table and in cooking is the best way to decrease your sodium intake.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have high blood pressure so I don't really need to be concerned about the health consequences of sodium.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have to worry about my toddler (or preschooler) having too much sodium in their diet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sea salt is healthier than regular table salt.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sodium is not found in bread and bakery products.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nutrition claims like "Reduced sodium" on a food label assures you that there's not much sodium in a food.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered False to all of these questions, you are on your way to Halting the Salt in your diet. If you answered True to any of these questions, update your sodium knowledge and stay informed by following 'What's Happening' at www.sodium101.ca.



Needles in the grass

The last thing you'd expect to see

With the warming weather, adults are cleaning their yards and children have begun playing outdoors in parks and other public places. It's an exciting time, but the melting snow may reveal some unexpected and unwelcome surprises.



There are people in the community who use intravenous drugs. On rare occasions needles and other injection equipment end up discarded and hidden by the winter's snow. If this happens adults and children may be at risk for a needle-stick or other puncture injury. These injuries can happen at the most unlikely times. They may occur when children are playing on the beach or behind a park bench or when using a public washroom.

A needle discarded unsafely in a plastic bag also presents a hazard to someone who is collecting garbage.

What's the risk?

Diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C are carried in the blood. These infections are not spread through everyday contact but can be spread through the sharing of needles and other drug equipment. Discarded used needles and drug equipment pose a risk to anyone who handles them. Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C can live for an extended period of time on used needles and equipment. Even though only a small percentage of the population is infected with these diseases, the risk is high among injection drug users.

Avoiding injury

It is important to ensure that young children playing on a beach or playground wear protective shoes or sandals. Children should be taught never to touch a discarded needle, but to show an adult where it is.

If you need to handle a found needle, follow these precautions:

- ◆ Do not touch it with your bare hands: pick them up with thick gloves or, if handy, use tongs or pliers.
- ◆ Hold the tip away from you and be careful not to prick yourself.
- ◆ Place the needle tip down into a non-breakable plastic container such as a water or pop container and close tightly. The health unit has worked with community partners to have

special containers placed in some key locations for the safe and discreet disposal of needles. You can call the health unit to learn of such a location, or take the container to a health unit office.

You may also consider calling your municipal office to obtain information regarding their hazardous waste disposal sites. Never discard a needle in the garbage or in the sewer.

When handling garbage from a household or a business never compact the bag as this may increase your exposure to needles.

If a needle does puncture your skin, here are some suggestions to reduce the risk of infection.

- ◆ Let the cut bleed freely, wash the area with soap and water, and apply an antiseptic such as rubbing alcohol or peroxide.
- ◆ Immediately see a health care provider such as your family doctor or at the local emergency department. The risk of getting an infection is very low, but each situation needs to be discussed thoroughly as soon as possible.

Interested partners are welcome to suggest new locations for safe needle disposal sites.

