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Health MATTERS

March 2009

Tooth decay—filling in the story

In the 2007-2008 school year, health unit dental hygienists screened 25,129 children in elementary schools across Simcoe and Muskoka for dental disease. Of those, 2,172 children—almost one in nine—had unmet urgent dental care needs such as large open cavities and oral infections.

Despite the fact that dental decay is largely preventable, health unit research shows that our children's oral health is among the worst in Ontario. More than half of the 7 and 9-year-old children in Simcoe and Muskoka have some form of tooth decay. Consistently, the oral health of 5, 7, 9 and 13-year-olds in Simcoe and Muskoka ranks in the bottom 15 to 30 per cent of health units surveyed. And in recent years, serious decay problems in 5-year-olds have increased dramatically, well ahead of the provincial average.

A number of factors contribute to poor dental health in this region.

- Low income puts dental care out of reach for many people. About 154,000 in the region don't have dental insurance.
- Only 17.5 per cent of families took advantage of free topical fluoride treatment offered for their children; among those offered free pit and fissure sealants, only 27 per cent used the treatment.
- Lack of knowledge about prevention contributes to decay. For example, a mother could unwittingly pass on bacteria that cause decay by warming up a baby's soother in her own mouth.
- Thirty per cent of adults over 65 have not visited the dentist in three years or more.
- Only seven per cent of Simcoe Muskoka's population has access to fluoridated water supply, a highly effective means of preventing decay in young, old, rich and poor.

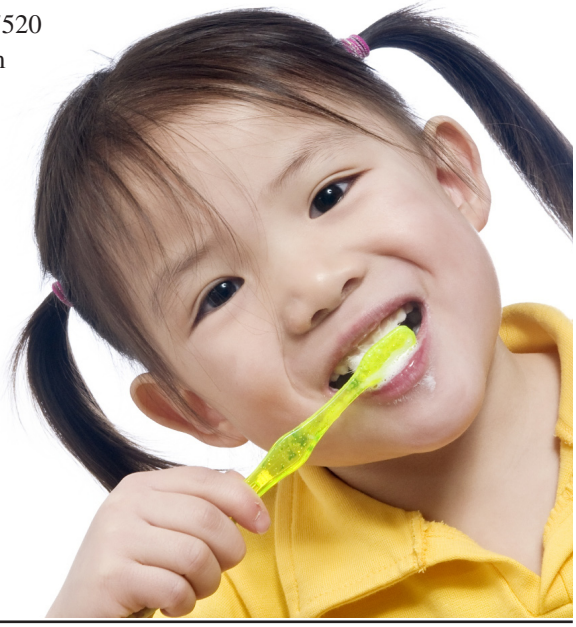
The high level of decay in children is tragic when we know how preventable tooth decay is. Families can follow a few simple steps to practise good oral health.

Tips for healthy teeth

- Brush regularly using fluoride toothpaste.
- At mealtime, feature the recommended foods in Canada's Food Guide, and avoid high-sugar soft drinks and snacks.
- Access professionally applied topical fluoride and/or pit and fissure sealants if there is high risk of decay.
- Plan your child's first visit to the dentist at an early age, ideally at 1 year.

The research report *Oral Health in Simcoe Muskoka* is available on the website www.simcoemuskokahealth.org by clicking on the HealthSTATS link.

For more information about protecting your oral health call *Your Health Connection* at 721-7520 or 1 877-721-7520 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.



A survival guide for power failures

Some power outages can leave you without hydro, heating or air conditioning for several hours or even days. If you are prepared for a power interruption you can reduce its impact on you and your family.

Before…

Prepare an emergency kit that includes batteries, flashlights, important documents, cash etc.

Contact your doctor or pharmacist about proper storage of medication like insulin that requires refrigeration. Also ask how to properly dispose of drugs if they have spoiled.

Consider buying an emergency generator for power outages—but first check with the dealer or maker of your furnace, appliance and lighting fixtures about power requirements and proper operating procedures.

Buy a battery-operated or hand-cranked radio so you can listen for updates on the situation and receive advice from local authorities.

If you only have cordless phones in your house, you will not have phone service. You may want to purchase an extra corded phone, which operates without electricity, so you can still call out and receive calls.

Make sure your home has a working carbon monoxide detector. If it is hard-wired to the house's electrical supply, be sure it has battery back-up power.

During…

During the power outage avoid opening and closing refrigerator and freezer doors. Keeping the doors closed will help maintain internal temperatures. Without power, the refrigerator section will keep foods cool for four to six hours and a full upright or chest freezer will keep food frozen for about two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for one day. If possible, add bags of ice to the refrigerator to keep temperatures cooler for longer.

Unplug electronic equipment (stereos, TVs, computers) and appliances such as microwaves to prevent damage from a power surge when power is turned back on. Also, power can be restored more easily when there is not a heavy load on the electrical system.

Turn off all lights, except one inside and one outside, so that both you and hydro crews outside know when the power has been restored.

Never use charcoal or gas barbecues, camp heaters, or home generators indoors as they will produce and release carbon monoxide. If this colourless and odourless gas is inhaled it may be fatal.

…After power has been restored

Eating foods that have been improperly refrigerated or frozen can cause food-borne illness. Regardless of odour or appearance, any perishable foods that have been stored above 4 C for more than two hours must be discarded. They may contain unsafe levels of bacteria that, if eaten, could result in food poisoning. When in doubt, throw it out.

Those who have private wells and depend on a treatment system for their drinking water should be sure their system is running properly once the power is restored. Before drinking the water, flush all lines letting the water run for about two minutes. If there are concerns that the treatment system is not working properly, water should be boiled before drinking. Be sure to bring the water to a rolling boil for at least one minute.

For more information on what to do to prepare for a power outage or how to prepare an emergency kit call *Your Health Connection* 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m..

For more information on evacuation plans or how to prepare your home for an evacuation visit www.getprepared.ca.

Safe body art

Don't let a tattoo open a gateway to disease

Tattooing, body piercing and other types of body art have been around for years but recently they have become popular among all ages. Television shows have sprung up devoted to body art. But these shows often fail to mention the serious health risks associated with body art and what you should do to protect yourself.

Tattooing involves using needles to place ink or other pigments into or under the skin. Piercing involves inserting jewellery into various parts of the body. Both techniques break the skin, one of your body's main protective barriers. This means diseases such as HIV, hepatitis C, hepatitis B and tetanus can result if incorrect practices, procedures or equipment are used by the body artist. Infections can also occur if aftercare guidelines are not followed by the client. Other health risks include allergic reactions to the tattooing dyes, bacterial infections, disfigurement of body parts, scarring or permanent discoloration of the skin.

However, a skilled, responsible tattoo artist or body piercer following public health regulations will protect you from infection.

Once you have chosen the art you want and where you would like it placed, you need to consider where to get the work done. Be a smart consumer and visit several shops before you make a decision.

What to look for in a body art shop

- The shop should be clean and the body artist should have good personal hygiene, with clean hands, nails and clothes.
- The shop should have an autoclave. Autoclaves sterilize tools used to perform the body art. When body art equipment is not properly sterilized, you can come into contact with blood or other body fluids from a previous client of the shop—someone who may be infected with HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- Ask to see the shop's autoclave spore test results. Monthly spore tests are required and are the only way to see if the autoclave is properly sterilizing equipment. A negative (no growth) result means the autoclave is working properly.
- All body art shops must be inspected by a public health inspector, who will leave an inspection certificate with a date. Ask the shop to see their inspection certificate issued by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and check to see it has a date with the current year. Do not get body art at a shop that does not have an inspection certificate.

What to look for in a body artist

Ask the artist to explain their procedure from beginning to end. All body artists have different skills and training but they should all be knowledgeable in procedures and in infection prevention practices. Make sure the artist does the following:

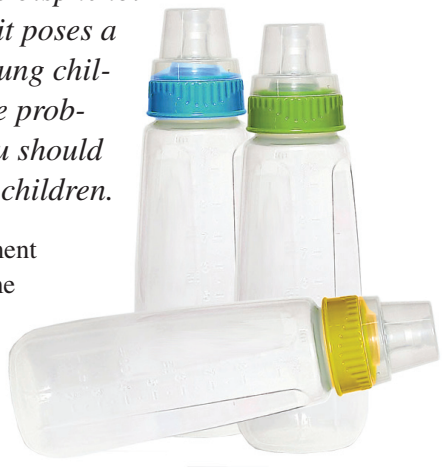
- Only uses a new, disposable razor every time shaving is required
- Opens sterile needles/equipment being used for your procedure in front of you
- Washes their hands with soap and dries with paper towel before any procedure
- Uses single-use gloves – meaning they are thrown out after each client
- Uses single-use cups for the dyes
- Provides you with an aftercare sheet explaining the proper care and cleaning for your body art.

Protect your health by knowing what you want and be sure your procedure is done by a knowledgeable, responsible body artist using infection prevention practices.

Plastic convenience or toxic trap?

The BPA dilemma

There have been a lot of news stories about the plastic additive bisphenol A, or BPA, and whether it poses a health hazard for our young children. As a parent you are probably wondering what you should be doing to protect your children.



Last year the federal government announced it was putting some controls on the sale of baby bottles containing the chemical bisphenol A.

This action was taken because some animal studies suggest potential health effects from low levels of BPA. Scientists have concluded that a baby's exposure to BPA is at safe levels. However, there is still some scientific uncertainty and this has prompted caution.

Where is it found?

BPA is a chemical used to make clear, hard plastics sometimes called polycarbonates. Tests have detected BPA migrating out of food and liquid containers and into the food itself. This is seen in a variety of plastic packaging materials including infant formula containers and baby bottles. People can be exposed to BPA from food or drinks. Exposure also happens in less significant amounts from the air, drinking water, soil and dust, consumer products and other sources.

What is the health concern?

The research shows that even at low levels, exposure to BPA may result in a wide range of reproductive and developmental effects. It may be linked to a variety of conditions from cancers to attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, early puberty in women and obesity.

BPA can accumulate in the womb, exposing the fetus to levels higher than those through other stages of a child's life. In addition, BPA has been detected in breast milk, but at levels lower than those found in infant formula.

Infants and young children—and fetuses in the womb – are more sensitive to chemicals because they are still growing. They also get more exposure to BPA than the rest of us. One of the main routes of exposure is through polycarbonate baby bottles that have been heated and from cans containing infant formula.

If you are concerned about BPA in plastic products for you and your family, then it makes sense to reduce your exposure to them.

What can I do?

- Breast milk is the best food for newborns and infants. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months of life for healthy infants, with continued breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond.
- Use non-polycarbonate plastic containers—or alternatives to plastic such as glass, ceramic or stainless steel—to heat food or liquids.
- Polycarbonate plastics will have a #7 recycling symbol, which represents a broad category of plastics. The only way to be sure it is polycarbonate is if the #7 also has a "PC" beside it. If there isn't a recycling symbol, you won't be able to tell whether it contains BPA.
- If you use polycarbonate baby bottles, do not put very hot or boiling liquids in them because BPA will migrate out of the bottle at a much higher rate. Instead allow hot liquids to cool to lukewarm in a non-polycarbonate container before transferring to baby bottles.

For more information on bisphenol A or other health concerns call *Your Health Connection* weekdays at 721-7520 (1-877-721-7520) weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or visit our website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

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