





# 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!

