



Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

simcoe muskoka
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

15 Sperling Drive,
Barrie, ON L4M 6K9
Your Health Connection



Health MATTERS

February 2011

Vaccine records and school children

Students whose immunization information is not filed with the health unit may be suspended from school for 20 days or more.

Over the last 50 years immunization has saved more lives in Canada than any other health intervention. When vaccination rates drop, rates of disease rise. Thanks to the amount of international travel today, diseases are now globe-trotters, creating new risks for people who haven't been vaccinated. So it's critical to get vaccinated to stay healthy.

On the other side of the coin, public health officials also need to know who has not been vaccinated—so they can help the people who are most vulnerable to infectious illness in the event of an outbreak.

Schools draw a lot of attention on this front. Ontario law requires health units to collect and maintain up-to-date records of immunization for every student registered in school or day nursery. Parents must provide the health unit with proof of completed immunization for the following diseases when registering their child in school: diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps and rubella.

Even if they have chosen not to vaccinate their child, parents or guardians must still provide the appropriate forms to the health unit.

Why suspensions?

School suspension is the last resort for the health unit to get full immunization details on all students. The health unit starts by mailing requests for immunization information during the school year. This letter only goes to students whose information is not on file or whose record is incomplete at the health unit. If the information is not received by the stated deadline, a notice of suspension will be sent in the mail to the parent or guardian of the student.

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Many goals are achieved with this work

- ◆ The health unit is able to assess the immunization status of children enrolled in schools across Simcoe and Muskoka.
- ◆ Populations that may be at risk of a disease are identified.
- ◆ It helps prevent the spread of disease.
- ◆ It increases awareness in immunization trends and disease outbreak.
- ◆ In the event of an outbreak or threatened outbreak of any disease the health unit would be able to determine the students who are at risk and notify their parents/guardians.



To get a child's info to the health unit

- **Use the secure online form** www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/immsonline
- **Fax a copy** of your child's immunization history to 705-721-1495.
- **Mail a copy** of your child's immunization history to: VPD Program, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, 15 Sperling Drive, Barrie ON, L4M 6K9.
- **Drop off a copy** of your child's immunization history to any one of the health unit office locations.
- **Call** Your Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 (toll free).

Think drinking is good for you? Think again

The link between alcohol and the risk of developing a chronic disease such as stroke or cancer has now been well established.

Most people are aware of the dangers of excessive use of alcohol. But did you know that what some may consider moderate drinking also poses a serious risk to your health?

In fact, more than two drinks a day will increase the risk of stroke and high blood pressure. As well research is showing one drink a day raises the risk of various types of cancers including cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon, rectum and breast.

To help you sort out what may be considered safer limits of alcohol consumption, follow the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines. These guidelines were developed by a team of medical and social researchers from the University of Toronto and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines

- ◆ Zero drinks = lowest risk of an alcohol-related problem
- ◆ No more than 2 standard drinks on any one day
- ◆ Women - up to 9 standard drinks a week
- ◆ Men - up to 14 standard drinks a week

What is a standard drink?



A “standard drink” can mean different things depending on the type of beverage.

The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines don’t apply to people with medical conditions or those who are on medications, are breastfeeding, pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Keep in mind also that these are “low-risk” guidelines and not “no-risk” guidelines.



Hangover campaign developed by the Focus Resource Centre. Reproduced and distributed by ODAP 2010, www.odap.org

To help yourself—and others

To keep alcohol consumption within a moderate or low-risk range, keep track of how much you drink, each day and each week. Consider talking to the people you care about in your life about the links between alcohol and chronic health problems. People can reduce the risks to their health if they know the facts. And if you are concerned that your drinking may be affecting your health, have a conversation with your health care practitioner or see www.simcoemuskokahealth.com.



If you are pregnant...

- There is no safe amount, no safe time and no safe kind of alcohol during pregnancy.
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a range of physical, mental, behavioural, and/or learning disabilities that may affect a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy.
- FASD affects 1% of the general population.
- Women who could become pregnant, plan to become pregnant or are pregnant should avoid alcohol.
- Women who want help to control alcohol use should contact ‘Your Health Connection’ for local support at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.
- Partners, family and friends play a part in prevention by supporting women who are considering becoming pregnant or are pregnant to make the decision not to drink.



Illustration provided by SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence

Tobacco is no treat for your baby

Many women decide to make healthier lifestyle choices during their pregnancy. Eating well, exercising and seeking prenatal care are all building blocks for a healthy mother and baby.

For women using tobacco products, pregnancy can also be a good time to think about breaking the habit. This is a healthy change that will benefit both of you.

Chemicals in a cigarette—there are more than 4,000 of them – pass from the mother to the baby. Exposure to smoke and these chemicals causes the oxygen level in your blood to fall. You need enough oxygen in your blood for your body to work and your baby to grow properly.

Benefits for baby

A baby benefits whether the mother quits smoking or even reduces the number of cigarettes. The benefits include:

- ◆ getting more oxygen to the developing baby
- ◆ less chance of stillbirth
- ◆ better chance of a normal birth weight (over 5.5 pounds)
- ◆ less likely to be born premature (born before 37 weeks)
- ◆ less chance of problems with the lungs, heart, digestive system and central nervous system.

Benefits for mom

There are also benefits for mothers who quit. They are at a lower risk for certain types of cancer, circulatory and digestive problems. Pregnant women who stop using tobacco products will have:

- ◆ less risk of vaginal bleeding, miscarriage and premature delivery
- ◆ more energy and breathe more easily throughout pregnancy
- ◆ a greater chance for success with breastfeeding, as smoking can lower the amount of breast milk a woman can produce
- ◆ more money to spend on other important items for themselves or their families.



And benefits beyond health

In a tobacco-free life you can look forward to fewer coughs and colds, fresher smelling clothes and fewer facial wrinkles. As a tobacco-free parent you will also enjoy long-term benefits:

- ◆ not exposing your child to second-hand smoke
- ◆ setting a great example for your child
- ◆ feeling proud and believing in your ability to overcome challenges.



Where to go for help

- Quitting smoking at any time is hard. The earlier you quit the better it will be for you and your baby.
- If you would like to take the first steps to being smoke free there are supports available to help you.
- Cessation counselling with a public health nurse is available to pregnant women and their partners or household members through the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Contact Your Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520.
- Smokers' Helpline - Quit specialists use a woman-centred approach to offer pregnant and women after birth up to 14 follow-up calls to support them in their journey to becoming smoke-free. 1-877-513-5333 www.smokershelpline.ca
- Motherisk - The Alcohol and Substance Use Helpline offers information and counselling to pregnant and breastfeeding women, their families, and health care providers. 1-877-327-4636 www.motherisk.org
- Pregnets - The Pregnets website hosts the most up-to-date information on smoking cessation practices for pregnant and postpartum women. www.pregnets.ca

When kids start falling ill at school...

Every September at the start of school, coughs and runny noses and upset stomachs crop up in classrooms. And as cold and flu season begins, it only gets worse.

The health unit receives many reports from school staff and board offices about increased illness. Most often they are respiratory (colds or influenza) and gastrointestinal (nausea, vomiting and diarrhea).

Parents and school staff can prevent many of the common diseases spread in schools by making sure their children:

- ◆ wash hands for at least 15 seconds often, particularly before eating, after using the washroom, and after coughing or sneezing
- ◆ cough or sneeze into their arm or a tissue
- ◆ stay home if they are sick and keep them home until they have been without symptoms for at least 24 hours
- ◆ stay up-to-date with their immunizations.



Reportable Diseases

For some more serious diseases, you could be required to keep your children out of school for longer than you might think. If a doctor diagnoses one of the following diseases, it is important for parents to keep their children home for the noted timeframes.

- ◆ Influenza: five days from start of symptoms
- ◆ Pertussis (whooping cough): five days from start of antibiotics or 21 days from start of symptoms (if untreated)
- ◆ Measles: four days from start of the rash
- ◆ Mumps: nine days from start of facial swelling
- ◆ Rubella (German measles): seven days from start of the rash

These are all known as “reportable diseases.” In Ontario, certain diseases are designated as reportable since they readily infect people, cause severe illness and they can spread easily from person to person.

Preventing spread

If a disease is reportable, doctors must notify the public health unit and the health unit may in turn call parents to give more direction. A surveillance process takes place at this point. The health unit’s investigators track down the source of the outbreak. The surveillance team also monitors its spread. And a variety of tactics are used to ensure that the outbreak ends as quickly as possible and with as little illness as possible.

One step involves checking immunization records for the students (see story on page 1). If a disease has erupted in a school for which a vaccine is available and your child has not been vaccinated against it, he or she will have to stay at home until the outbreak is over. The same will apply if the health unit has no records of the child’s vaccinations.

Schools, doctors, public health and you the parent: we are all partners in preventing the spread of infectious diseases.

