

Health MATTERS

June 2009

Eager to get to the beach

Simcoe and Muskoka have some of the finest beaches in Ontario. Through the long winter nights we dream about spending a hot sunny day with our families at one of these beaches.

But sometimes our anticipation is spoiled when we arrive to find a sign warning about elevated bacterial levels in the beckoning waters.

All open bodies of water contain bacteria, viruses and other organisms. Generally, we can deal with minor exposure to them. However, sometimes conditions cause them to grow. For swimmers this could lead to infection of the eyes, ears, nose or throat, or even stomach upset if they swallow too much water.

Beach Monitoring

Throughout the swimming season the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit regularly monitors the water at a selection of public beaches. The health unit sends water samples for lab testing of bacterial counts. Results come back in 24 to 36 hours.

The health unit assesses the bacterial counts along with the historical data for that particular beach. This will show if there is any risk to swimmers. If the risk is too high, the health unit notifies the municipality or the operator of the beach and a warning sign goes up. Meanwhile, sampling continues at the beach to find out when the risk has dropped.

Beach postings often occur when heavy rainfall washes material from the areas surrounding the beach or from nearby drainage ditches and streams into the lake. A posting could also result when wave action or large numbers of people in the water stir up bacteria that have naturally settled on the bottom. Where a swimming area regularly shows increased bacteria levels after rainstorms, a permanent sign may be posted warning bathers of the risk of swimming.

A beach posting is a warning only. If you choose to swim anyway, you face a higher potential for infection from that exposure.

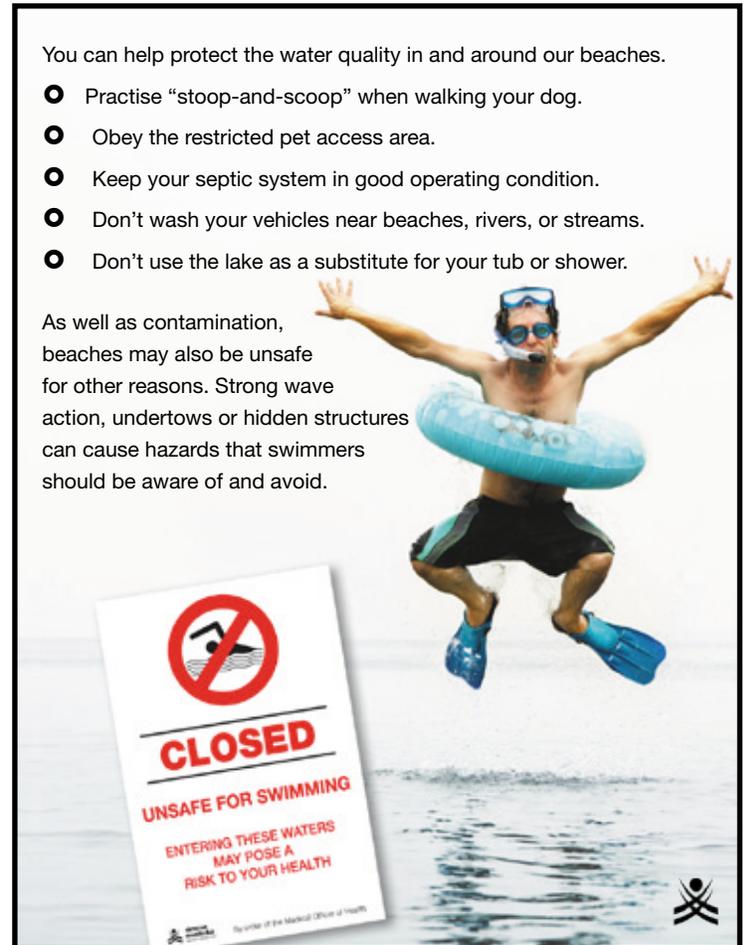
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A beach closure on the other hand prohibits people from swimming. The Medical Officer of Health orders a closure when a major event such as a chemical or sewage spill occurs, or if toxic algae blooms are found in the water. These situations pose an immediate and significant danger to swimmers.

You can help protect the water quality in and around our beaches.

- Practise “stoop-and-scoop” when walking your dog.
- Obey the restricted pet access area.
- Keep your septic system in good operating condition.
- Don’t wash your vehicles near beaches, rivers, or streams.
- Don’t use the lake as a substitute for your tub or shower.

As well as contamination, beaches may also be unsafe for other reasons. Strong wave action, undertows or hidden structures can cause hazards that swimmers should be aware of and avoid.



DHA for moms-to-be —a fat that’s good

You’ve heard that omega-3 fatty acids are important for good health, but they’re also important for a healthy pregnancy.

Omega-3 fatty acids are a special kind of healthy fat needed for human health. It’s important in our diet because our bodies do not produce them. Everyone benefits from them, including children.

One type of omega-3—docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)—is especially critical during pregnancy. It’s important for the development of the baby’s brain, nerves and eyes. Experts suggest that pregnant women get at least 300 mg of DHA each day.

How to get DHA

The best way to get DHA is through food. DHA is found naturally in fish, especially fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring and trout.

Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide recommends all people should eat at least two servings—a total of 150 g (5 oz) or 250 mL (1 cup) – of fish, preferably fatty fish, each week to meet your daily needs of DHA.

Should I eat fish?

For pregnant women who choose not to eat fish there are products available that are fortified with DHA. However, the amounts of DHA in these products are not comparable to the amount in fish. Even though a food may claim to be “a source of omega-3” it doesn’t mean it contains DHA. DHA is found in fish, seafood, marine algae and seaweed, so unless the fortified food contains these ingredients, it may not contain DHA. Read food labels carefully.

Bottom line

Fish is the main source of DHA and the easiest way to get the daily recommended amount during pregnancy. Pregnant women should continue to focus on ensuring sufficient intakes of other key nutrients such as folic acid and iron.



Fish oil supplements are not recommended. Taking a fish oil supplement may seem like the easiest way to get your DHA. However more research is needed to be certain it is safe during pregnancy. Until there is more evidence, pregnant women are not advised to take these supplements. Risks and disadvantages of supplements include:

- Cod liver oil supplements contain high levels of vitamin A which could be harmful to an unborn baby.
- Regulations do not adequately control the presence of toxins such as mercury and pesticides.
- Too much of a good thing can be bad. High amounts of fish oil can increase the risk of bleeding, especially for women that may be prone to bleeding.
- Fish and other food sources of omega-3 provide many important nutrients that we do not get from supplements. Fish oil supplements are not equivalent to eating fish.



Got questions about any of the stories in Health Matters?

◆ Visit the health unit’s website at simcoemuskokahealth.org.

◆ Call *Your Health Connection* Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520).

Mercury and seafood

Get the good, avoid the bad

Everyone, including pregnant women should eat fish and shellfish. Canada's Food Guide recommends eating at least 2 servings of fish each week (total of 150 grams or 5 ounces) because of the excellent nutritional value.

However, there is a concern about mercury in seafood. Most seafood contains only a tiny amount of this substance. Men and women who are not in their childbearing years should enjoy a variety of fish, but should limit high mercury fish to one serving per week.

We can all safely enjoy fish and shellfish in our diets by being aware of the types of seafood to limit or avoid. Special limits apply to:

- ◆ Small children between the ages of 1 and 4 years of age and weigh 16.5 kg (approximately 36 pounds). If your child is smaller, reduce the serving size of fish.
- ◆ Older children ages 5 to 15 years of age can follow the consumption advice for small children, but they can eat a larger serving size.
- ◆ This fish consumption advice only applies to fish bought at the market or store. If sport fish are consumed, refer to the Ministry of the Environment's Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish. www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/guide

Consumption Advice for Small Children, Women of Childbearing Age, and Pregnant Women



Celebrating women’s health —with a preventive twist

This spring, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit partnered with 20 local hair salons in a cancer screening promotion campaign entitled Celebrating Women.

The campaign is reaching women 20 years of age and older to raise awareness of the importance of breast, cervical and colorectal cancer prevention and screening.

Regular cancer screening is part of a healthy lifestyle, just as much as healthy eating, daily physical activity, tobacco-free living, limiting alcohol intake and being sun safe. Regular screening is an important way to find cancer early before you have symptoms, and when it can be most successfully treated. Maintain your health and reduce your risk from cancer—regular cancer screening saves lives!

Deaths from all cancers in Simcoe and Muskoka are higher than the Ontario provincial average, for both sexes. Our region is also behind the target for cancer screening set in the Cancer 2020 report.

The following breast, cervical and colorectal screening tests are available across Simcoe Muskoka.

Colorectal Cancer Screening

- ◆ If you are 50 years of age or older, without a family history of colorectal cancer you should be screened.
- ◆ This is done by using an easy-to-use Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) every two years, available from your health care provider.
- ◆ More information can be obtained by calling the Colon Cancer Check INFOline at 1-866-410-5853.

Cervical Cancer Screening

- ◆ You should have your first Pap test within three years after you start having sex.
- ◆ If your tests are normal for three years in a row, then you will need a Pap test every two or three years.
- ◆ You should continue having a Pap test after menopause (when your monthly periods stop).



- ◆ Women over 70 years of age can stop having Pap tests if there are at least three normal tests in the previous ten years.
- ◆ Ask your health care provider to do a Pap test.

Breast Cancer Screening

- ◆ You should have a regular examination for any early signs of cancer including mammography (breast X-ray) and a physical exam of the breasts by your health care provider.
- ◆ It is recommended that women aged 50 to 74 years of age have a mammogram, generally every two years.
- ◆ Women between 50 and 74 years of age can book their own appointment. There is no cost for this screening.
- ◆ Call the OBSP screening location closest to you to make an appointment:
 - Alliston: Stevenson Memorial Hospital (705) 435-5208
 - Barrie: Royal Victoria Hospital (705) 739-5610
 - Bracebridge: South Muskoka Memorial Hospital (705) 645-3000
 - Midland: Huronia Medical Centre X-ray and Ultrasound (705) 526-5000
 - Orillia: Ontario Medical Imaging (705) 326-2244

Screening also has the added benefit of giving a person peace of mind about their health. Talk to your family members about cancer screening, to help share the message that many kinds of cancer are preventable.

