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Your Health Connection



Health MATTERS

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Thinking about drinking? – think again!

Simcoe-Muskoka is a recreational paradise. Visitors and local residents alike enjoy all it has to offer, especially during the summer. But they often display a ‘vacationer’s attitude,’ ready to kick up their heels, have fun and play hard. Alcohol is often part of the mix.

The public is generally aware of the risks and the laws around drinking and driving a car. But that doesn’t always apply to attitudes towards recreational vehicles including boats, ATVs and snowmobiles. Drinking and using any of these vehicles is against the law and dangerous. Drinking and driving is drinking and driving – on the road, on the water or on the trail.

Many risks

Here are a few sobering facts to consider before you head out on the boat or hit the trails on the ATV:

- If you are charged with impaired driving on your boat, or on your ATV while on the road, you immediately lose your driver’s licence for 90 days and can’t drive your car.
- If convicted of impaired driving, you will lose your driver’s licence and all driving privileges for at least one year and ...
 - pay a fine;
 - pay for and attend a “Back on Track” program;
 - pay for, install, and drive with an ignition interlock (a breathalyser connected to the car’s ignition);
 - you will have a criminal record;
 - your insurance rates will go up by 300 per cent or more;
 - legal fees can run from \$2,000 to \$10,000.



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More safety tips for your summer

- ATVs are meant for one person...only! And this person should be at least 16 and wearing a helmet.
- Don’t rock the boat – canoes and small boats tip easily. Alcohol added to the mix impairs your balance. You could end up in the drink!
- Avoid heat stroke – in the hot weather drink lots of fluids and avoid alcohol. Alcohol dehydrates you and increases your risk of heat stroke.
- Don’t make assumptions about where you can ride your ATV – every city and municipality has its own bylaws, so you need to check before hitting the trails. Some communities do not allow ATVing anywhere within their jurisdiction.
- Mixing alcohol and waterskiing or windsurfing can be a real drowner. Alcohol slows down the reflexes and coordination you need to safely catch the wave.
- Don’t swim when you have been drinking – alcohol affects your swallowing and breathing reflexes making you more likely to drown.
- Fishermen are boaters too! Alcohol is linked to most boating and fishing fatalities. Booze doesn’t belong on the boat.
- Keep your head above water – wear your personal flotation device at all times. Remember...one size does not fit all! PFDs save lives, but only if you wear them!
- Let people know where you are going and when you will be back.

The key to great summer memories is simple: play safe, drive alcohol-free and follow the rules.



The new vaccine offered to Grade 8 girls

In August 2007, the provincial government announced a new vaccine program for Human papillomavirus (HPV).

Whenever a new vaccine is introduced the public has lots of questions and this was no exception. Many important questions are carefully considered before public funding is approved for a vaccine.

What is HPV and why is prevention so important?

HPV is one of the most common strains of virus in the world today. It is also one of the world's leading sexually transmitted infections. HPV is transmitted by skin-to-skin contact. This infection can affect cells on both the inside and outside of the body, causing warts and changes in the cells of the cervix. Most importantly, it is a known cause of cancer of the cervix. Many people who get HPV are unaware they are infected and may unknowingly spread the infection.



The vaccine provides protection from the four most common types of HPV. Two of these strains cause about 60 to 70 per cent of all cervical cancers; the other two cause about 90 per cent of all genital warts.

Local vaccine program

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit offered the HPV vaccine to Grade 8 female students in the fall and winter in 2007-08. The program reached 65 per cent of Grade 8 girls throughout the district. The third HPV vaccine will be offered in the spring of 2008. Female Grade 8 students who were absent at school clinics or postponed the initial vaccine are able to complete the series by booking an appointment at local health unit offices.

Is the vaccine safe?

Health Canada ensures that all vaccines meet strict safety standards before approving a vaccine. Once a vaccine is introduced there is ongoing monitoring for any unusual events after receiving vaccine. The most common side effects from HPV vaccine include pain, redness, swelling and itching where the needle was given. Other common side effects can include headache, fever, nausea and dizziness. Serious side effects are rare.

The vaccine is available by prescription for girls not in Grade 8 through their family doctor or health unit for a fee. The cost of the three doses of vaccine for females not in Grade 8 is about \$400 and may be covered by employee health care plans.

Even with the research and reassurances, it's normal for parents to be concerned about their children's health and safety.

Why only Grade 8 girls?

The vaccine is given in a series of three doses. It is recommended for girls 9 to 26 years of age. The provincial government, after weighing costs, benefits, and the effectiveness of an HPV immunization program, decided to fund free vaccine to Grade 8 girls. Girls of this age are not likely to have already been exposed to the virus and school clinics give young women an easy way of getting the vaccine. The use of HPV vaccines in males is currently being studied.

Any questions you may have can be answered by the staff at Your Health Connection, at 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520. You can also visit our website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org to find out more about HPV.



The emergency contraceptive pill

– there’s got to be a morning after

All the planning and education and talking about sex doesn’t always safeguard against the moments when unprotected sex happens.

Unprotected sex could mean many things.

- You did not use birth control.
- A condom broke or slipped off.
- You forgot to take your birth control pills.
- You were late getting your Depo shot or late applying the patch or inserting the ring.
- You took medication while on the pill, patch or ring that could decrease the effectiveness of that method.
- You were sexually assaulted.

When that happens, women who want to prevent pregnancy have an option: the emergency contraceptive pill or ECP. ECP has been available since the 1960s, but some people, especially young adults, are not aware of it.

How ECP works

ECP contains a hormone that works to prevent an egg from being released or fertilized, or to prevent a fertilized egg from implanting in the lining of the uterus. If used properly it reduces the risk of pregnancy by up to 95 per cent. It can be used up to five days after unprotected sex but it is most effective within 72 hours. If a woman has not had a normal period by 21 days after treatment, she should have a pregnancy test.

ECP is usually taken in 2 doses, 12 hours apart, although it is as effective if both tablets are taken at the same time. ECP is available in Canada from pharmacists without a prescription. It can also be obtained from sexual health clinics, after-hours clinics and through health care providers.



How safe is it?

There are occasional side effects to ECP including nausea, vomiting and irregular menstrual bleeding. However, it has been carefully studied and it is safe. According to the World Health Organization, the only women who should not use ECP are those who are already pregnant. Women who are breastfeeding can safely take it.

It’s important to note that ECP provides no protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Protection against infections requires the use of condoms. If there is any doubt, request a test for STI.

Because there have been barriers to young adults gaining access to ECP, more education is needed about what it is, how effective it is and where you can get it. Understanding ECP is just one part of the larger objective of increasing sexual health awareness. Greater knowledge gives young adults the tools they need to make informed choices, reduce the risks of sexually transmitted infections and inspire respectful, caring and loving relationships.



There's no such thing as a dumb question— only answers that can help.

thephakz.ca

Bats and the rabies hazard

You suddenly wake in the middle of the night to the sound of something fluttering around the room or perhaps even landing on your bed – and realize somehow a bat got into your home.

What should you do now? Most of us have heard that bats can get rabies, but do you really know what it is and how it might affect you and your family?

Rabies is caused by a virus that infects the nerves and brain in warm-blooded animals. It eventually causes death. Rabid animals can spread the disease from their saliva through a bite, scratch or lick. Your pets may be protected with rabies shots, but people exposed to rabid animals must seek treatment immediately. Once symptoms appear, rabies cannot be cured.

Why worry about bat rabies?

There are three different strains of rabies presently in Ontario. One strain affects mostly foxes and other wildlife, another affects raccoons and a third strain is found in bats. Rabies in bats is quite low. There were 62 rabid bats confirmed in all of Ontario in 2007.

Although human deaths from rabies are rare in North America, 70 per cent of them since 1980 were caused by a bat strain of rabies.

Bat exposure could occur anywhere; in homes, cottages, tents or the outdoors. Bats normally come out at night and prefer to leave people alone. Unusual behaviour such as flying in daytime or flopping on the ground as if injured may indicate rabies. However, there may also be no obvious abnormal “rabid” behaviour. All contact with bats or other wild animals should be reported to your local health unit.

Bats’ teeth are so fine that visual inspection for bite marks is not always reliable. Any bat that may have had direct contact with a person, or was found in a room with anyone sleeping, should be safely captured and held for rabies testing. Use heavy gloves, boxes or netting to avoid direct contact. You should avoid releasing or disposing of the bat until you check with the health unit about the need for testing the animal.

Bat-proofing steps

You can start bat proofing your home by inspecting your attic space, rafters, porches and walls for signs such as bat droppings and a strong musty odor. Look for openings where bats could get into sleeping quarters – anything larger than a quarter-inch by a half-inch is all they need.

Prevent bats from entering your home

- Seal openings using materials such as expanding spray-on foam, caulk, wire mesh, wood that fits tightly, steel wool around pipes that enter buildings, etc.
- Make sure windows have screens, chimneys are capped and gaps around outside electrical and plumbing fixtures are filled.

If there is evidence of bats already in your home, you should avoid bat proofing between late May and mid-August; you don’t want to trap young bats inside the building.

For on-going problems, you may wish to consult with a licensed pest controller specializing in “bat exclusion” to review other options. Information about rabies is also available under the rabies link on the SMDHU website www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

Bats are common in the woods and should not be feared while they are in their natural habitat. They eat many harmful insects and have an important place in the ecosystem. If you would like to learn more about bats, visit the website of Bat Conservation International at www.batcon.org.

