

Partnership Initiatives

Summary Report of Partnership Initiatives between the
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit,
School Boards and Schools in Simcoe Muskoka

Tel: 705-721-7520
Toll free: 1-877-721-7520
www.simcoemuskokahealth.org

2017-2018



**simcoe
muskoka**
DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between health and education is reciprocal. Healthy students are better learners, and more educated children and youth live healthier lives. As such, student health and well-being are shared priorities among the Health and Education sectors in Ontario. With over 84,000 students, attending (approximately) 205 schools, from seven school boards in Simcoe Muskoka, investing in Healthy Schools offers an opportunity to influence the health and well-being of our local students, and by extension their families and the communities that surround schools.

Student health and well-being are at the core of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU)'s work in promoting school health. The vision of our Healthy Schools Program is to promote optimal health, developmental potential and learning among school aged children and youth in Simcoe County and the District of Muskoka. We envision collaborative partnerships in which the health unit, school/school board staff, students, parents and community partners are engaged in efforts to make school communities a healthy place for all.



We engage in ongoing partnership and collaboration with local school boards and schools to assist in achieving this vision. Formal partnership agreements have been established between the SMDHU and two local school boards, demonstrating our mutual commitment to work collaboratively in support of healthy school environments that foster student well-being and academic success; discussion began in 2017-2018 in pursuit of a written agreement with a third school board. The SMDHU also provides local support to schools from an additional four school boards.

The SMDHU acknowledges the ongoing commitment demonstrated by two school boards through the provision of dedicated desk space and technological resources for the public health nurse (PHN) liaisons.

The purpose of this report is to provide a brief summary of the ongoing collaboration and partnership between the SMDHU and local school boards/schools during the 2017-2018 school year. The report also highlights our mutual focus on supporting the well-being of the whole-child (cognitive, physical, spiritual and emotional) at both an individual and population level. Together, we continue to work towards achieving our vision of making school communities a healthy place for all.

SCHOOL HEALTH – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

For the past ten years, the *Ontario Public Health Standards* (2008) have set the minimum requirements for the provision of mandatory public health programs and services. The SMDHU's program planning and service delivery for the 2017-2018 school year was reflective of these standards.

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released modernized [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS) in January 2018. Under these new requirements, a new School Health Standard was introduced. A variety of protocols and guidelines were subsequently released to accompany the standards including a new *School Health Guideline* (2018). Public health units must now:

- Collect and analyze relevant data to monitor trends, priorities and inequities related to the health of school aged children and youth.
- Provide population health information relevant to the school population to school boards to help identify public health needs.
- Develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive approach.
- Offer support to school boards and schools to assist with the implementation of health-related curricula and health needs.

In addition to meeting the provincial requirements set out in the OPHS, the SMDHU's approach to promoting and supporting school health is guided by evidence-based practices in health promotion and comprehensive school health. Health unit staff utilize the Ministry of Education's [Foundations for a Healthy School](#) framework (2015)¹ as a guide for supporting schools to address a variety of priority public health topics. These include, but are not limited to, topics such as: healthy eating, physical activity, substance use prevention, healthy growth and development, personal safety and injury prevention, and positive mental health promotion. Health unit staff apply a health equity lens, which takes into consideration the social determinants of health, in an effort to tailor programs and services in response to local community needs.



¹ Image from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/foundations.html>

THE SMDHU HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAM

During the 2017-2018 school year, the Healthy Schools Program was comprised of:



- two public health nurse-liaisons who work in close partnership with school board senior administration and staff to meet legislated requirements, streamline communications, and foster collaboration between the health unit and school boards
- one public health dietitian from the Healthy Schools Program assigned geographically to support nutrition-related initiatives in schools
- one public health nutritionist who provides best practice evidence and expertise on various nutrition topics
- six public health nurses, assigned geographically to work with school communities in planning and implementing Healthy Schools Programs and initiatives; and a program assistant.

The team operates under the direction of the Healthy Schools Program Manager, within the Community and Family Health Department of the SMDHU.

In planning for the 2018-2019 school year, one additional public health nurse was hired into a contract position with the Healthy Schools Program, to support the development of a positive mental health promotion strategy for the SMDHU. The SMDHU Board of Health also approved the creation of a seventh (full time, permanent) Healthy Schools public health nurse position in an effort to increase capacity in the Barrie and South Simcoe areas, beginning in the 2018-2019 school year.

SMDHU Program Support in Schools

Program teams from across the SMDHU provide expertise on a range of health topics, offer support to school boards, and deliver service within local schools. This work supports the health unit to meet its requirements under the Ontario Public Health Standards and supports improved health and well-being among school communities. The programs and services described in this report reflect the range of supports provided throughout the 2017-2018 school year.

DATA COLLECTION & ASSESSMENT

The SMDHU Healthy Schools Program uses local data to identify and monitor trends, priorities and inequities in the health of school-aged children and youth. During the 2017-2018 school year, this was accomplished through three key strategies:

Focus Report: Youth Health in Simcoe Muskoka

In 2017, the SMDHU released a Focus Report related to youth health with a focus on three key areas: mental health, physical health and substance use. The report, based primarily on local data from the *Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey* (OSDUHS, 2015) showed that:



- The majority of youth in Simcoe Muskoka are not meeting daily physical activity, healthy eating, and sleep guidelines putting students at increased risk for chronic disease
- Half reported their mental health as excellent or very good, while almost one-quarter reported their mental health as fair or poor
- Elevated stress was reported by approximately one in five local Grade 7 and 8 students, and by approximately half of students in Grades 11 and 12
- Alcohol is the number one drug used by youth in Simcoe Muskoka, followed by cannabis
- While cigarette smoking is at an all-time low, the emergence of electronic cigarettes and vaping is a growing topic of concern
- Trends were observed in physical health behaviours, and self-reported mental health by grade, perceived socioeconomic status, and gender (male/female); trends in drug use were observed by grade only.

The full report is [available](#) for download via the SMDHU's website.

The SMDHU is partnering with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) again for the 2019 OSDUHS by purchasing an oversampling of an additional 1,000 students attending school in the Simcoe Muskoka area. Students will be surveyed in order to produce reliable local estimates of health and risk behaviours. This data will enable the health unit to make comparisons between the health status of local youth, Ontario averages, and Simcoe Muskoka data from 2015. The results may also be used to inform adaptations to existing services and/or the creation of new programming for school aged children and youth.

Climate Survey Data

School boards are mandated to conduct climate surveys at least every two years. The health unit has partnered with one school board to have Healthy Schools needs assessment questions added to their school climate survey and data sharing agreements are in place related to this. In another school board, secondary schools are conducting assessments of students in partnership with a university and those results are shared (with consent) with the health unit. The ability to partner on these initiatives assists in identification of issues at local schools and informs program planning.

Local Healthy Schools Assessments

At a local school level, Healthy Schools PHNs offered outreach visits to administrators (or designates). These visits, which began in September and continued into 2018, provided an opportunity for PHNs to assess school-specific strengths, needs and issues related to health and well-being.

Promoting mental health and physical activity were the health-related needs/issues most commonly identified by school administrators during outreach visits. A range of other topics of public health significance were also discussed, and varied by school community. Examples include: healthy eating, injury prevention, and tobacco/substance misuse, among others.

Assessment data is used at the individual school level to inform school action planning. Healthy Schools public health nurses work collaboratively with administrators, educators, students, families, and community organizations to address identified school priorities.

INFORMATION SHARING

The health unit routinely shares information with school boards, including social determinants of health and health inequities information, to assist school boards and schools with identifying and responding to public health issues of relevance to them, for example:

- **Emergency management notifications** were communicated, as required, to select designates from local school boards for dissemination to school staff and community stakeholders. This established process supported the SMDHU in ensuring that information affecting vulnerable populations (including children) was communicated to relevant stakeholders in an accurate and timely manner. Communications included topics such as extreme weather notifications, food safety recalls, communicable diseases, etc. The list of designated recipients for these emergency management notifications is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.



- **“No money for food is Cent\$less”** was a campaign developed by the SMDHU to raise awareness about the impacts of household food insecurity, and to advocate to the province for a basic income guarantee. Select campaign materials were distributed to local schools, through collaboration with our school board partners. The information encouraged school stakeholders to consider the impact that household food insecurity has on the health of students and their families. To assist schools that participate in food drives, a resource was also created to provide suggestions for healthy food donations.



PROGRAM OF PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

The SMDHU offers a wide range of public health programs and interventions for schools, following a comprehensive health promotion approach. In the 2017-2018 school year, the following programs and interventions were offered:

Chronic Disease Prevention

- **School travel planning** is an evidence-based, comprehensive model for implementing active school travel. It brings school, health and community stakeholders together to systematically address barriers to and incentives for walking to school. In December 2017, the SMDHU hosted a half day regional workshop entitled *Moving Together Toward Active School Travel*, with attendance from a variety of school and community stakeholders. The health unit's objective was to increase local awareness of the school travel planning model, and to engage stakeholders in conversations about perceptions and concerns related to local implementation. A second objective, was to prepare local stakeholders to potentially apply for funding to support school travel planning initiatives. Following the workshop, a summary report was produced and shared with attendees. Conversations have since continued with local school boards, and community groups, to support movement towards adopting and implementing the school-travel planning model within Simcoe Muskoka.



Healthy Eating

- **Bright Bites** is a web-based program, created by Ontario Dietitians in Public Health to support schools in improving student nutrition. It was designed to be used as an incentive program to motivate schools to earn 'badges' and share their success. The health unit encouraged schools to access the Bright Bites website for supporting tools, resources and innovative ideas that help schools reach their healthy eating goals.
- **Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler (NutriSTEP)** is a program, developed to support parents and health professionals in assessing early childhood nutrition. The SMDHU promoted the online versions of this screening tool, Nutri-eSTEP, to families of students who entered kindergarten in the fall of 2017.



- **You're the Chef** is a best practice program designed to help students (aged 10 and older) develop the skills and confidence needed to prepare healthy and tasty recipes, with an emphasis on vegetables and fruit. In 2017-2018, health unit staff recruited and trained 17 volunteer leaders (including school staff, parents/guardians, and student leaders) from 13 schools. These trained leaders facilitated the You're the Chef program at their school over a four to six week period. Students who participated learned basic cooking and safe food handling skills while learning to make healthy eating choices. Leaders reported that the students enjoyed trying new foods and cooking, had fun, and enjoyed spending time with friends.



Injury Prevention

- **Cyber-Seniors** is a program that connects local students with seniors living in residences through technology based mentorship. It is a community initiative brought to our region by the Fall Prevention Collaborative (FPC) of Simcoe Muskoka (formerly Simcoe Muskoka Integrated Fall Strategy). The health unit provides coordination as an FPC founder and member. Students from two schools participated in the program. In addition, high school students from five secondary schools participated as volunteers in the Cyber-Seniors program, and earned community service hours, while providing mentorship to seniors living independently within their local community.
- **National Teen Driver Safety Week** was celebrated in October 2017. The SMDHU promoted key messages from this campaign within our local community, in an effort to raise awareness about this important topic with families and youth. Two secondary schools partnered with the SMDHU and Ontario Provincial Police to share information within their school community through interactive displays, posters and resources.
- **Concussion prevention and helmet safety awareness** activities, such as school assemblies and bicycle safety events were provided at three elementary schools in collaboration with community partners (including police, local township representatives, and bicycle shops). Students learned about bicycle and helmet safety. Ontario Provincial Police partners generously provided new helmets to students in need.



- **Parachute Canada - Safe Kids Week** is celebrated annually during the first week of June. In 2018, the theme selected was concussion (at home, at play and on the road). The SMDHU promoted key messages from this campaign, with the support of our school board partners, through newsletter inserts/e-blasts, and through the health unit's social media. These messages were intended to educate families about concussion prevention and to remind families of their roles and responsibilities, as per school boards' concussion policies.

Healthy Growth and Development

- **Triple P – Positive Parenting Program** is an evidence-based program that aims to increase knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents and reduce the prevalence of mental health, emotional, and behavioural problems in children and adolescents. Public health nurses delivered Triple P at interested schools, and provided staff orientation related to Triple P, by request. A variety of promotional strategies were used to raise awareness about Triple P within local school communities, and to encourage participation in the sessions offered.

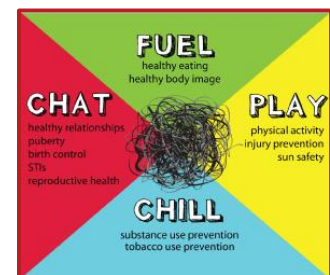


- **Health Connection** is the health unit's free confidential health information and advice service. Approximately 83 publicly funded elementary and secondary schools contacted Health Connection during the 2017-2018 school year to access health information and resources on a range of public health topics, including: infectious diseases/infection prevention and control, immunization, healthy eating, parenting, sexual health, tobacco prevention and enforcement, substance use prevention, oral health, and the determinants of health. Health Connection representatives also assisted 10 schools in connecting with their Healthy Schools PHN and/or to request specific public health programming for their local school community.



Mental Health Promotion

- **Can You Feel It?** is a two-part stress workshop for students in Grade 5 and up, that is available through the health unit for teachers to download and deliver in their classroom. The Can You Feel It? lessons build students' knowledge about stress, and support them in developing resiliency and healthy coping

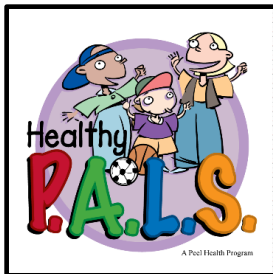


skills. Healthy Schools PHNs offered training to educators, and co-facilitated the program in classrooms by request to support capacity building.

- To determine the effectiveness of the Can You Feel It? workshop, a pilot evaluation was created between the SMDHU and one local school board. The goals of the evaluation were to:
 - obtain an understanding of participants' perceived experiences of stress and coping
 - assess the program's effect on changing participant's perceived knowledge about stress and coping
 - obtain participant and facilitator perception of the workshops and related materials, and
 - inform changes to the workshop.

Data was collected during the 2017-2018 school year and is currently being analyzed by the SMDHU. Results will be shared with the school board in 2018-2019. The results of the pilot evaluation will be used to assess both the students' and facilitators' perceptions of the workshops as well as the student's perceived ability to apply the coping strategies learned as a result of attending the workshop.

- **Healthy Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (P.A.L.S.)** is an elementary school program intended to develop student leadership skills and developmental assets, increase physical activity, and decrease bullying and playground incidents by engaging students in fun and safe activities during recess. The Healthy Schools Program PHNs provided teacher-supervisor training, supported student leader training, and provided ongoing implementation supports to interested schools, by request.



The Healthy P.A.L.S. program has been running successfully in many elementary schools across one school board for several years. Recently, a need was identified to more closely examine the sustainability of the program as well as the factors that contribute its success. In partnership with one local school board, the SMDHU conducted an online survey with elementary school principals and Healthy P.A.L.S. facilitators, to gain an understanding of challenges to initiating and sustaining the program, as well as the strategies to overcome those barriers. Data was collected in June 2017 and a report of the findings was distributed to the school board in the fall of 2018. The report also included recommendations to strengthen the uptake and retention of the program and to highlight the successes of the program. The school board is working in collaboration with the SMDHU to implement these recommendations.

- **Roots of Empathy** is an evidence-based program that has been shown to decrease bullying and aggression while raising social emotional competence and empathy among children. In 2017-2018, two Healthy Schools PHNs delivered the Roots of Empathy program, in one classroom each. A PHN-Liaison from the health unit partners with an Itinerant Resource Teacher-Equity and Inclusion at one school board to coordinate instructor training and local programming.



Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction

- **R.A.C.E. (Respect, Action, Courage and Excellence) Against Drugs** is an interactive program for Grade 5 students that teaches about healthy decision making and personal safety with regards to drug and alcohol. The program was delivered in Midland, Collingwood and South Simcoe by the health unit in collaboration with local community partners (including police and community mental health organizations). 1,707 students from 47 schools participated in this program during the 2017-2018 school year.



- **Truth and Consequences** is an interactive drug and alcohol awareness program designed for Grades 7 and up. The program can be downloaded as a seven-part lesson plan series and delivered by teachers in their classroom, or can be delivered in a conference format in partnership with the health unit and community organizations. In the 2017-2018 school year, conferences were held in one elementary and two secondary schools, with support from the SMDHU. Students demonstrated strong interest and engagement in the learning activities.



- **Tobacco awareness and enforcement** programming was provided by Tobacco Enforcement Officers (TEOs) and public health nurses to encourage compliance with, and support schools in meeting the requirements of the Smoke Free Ontario Act. During the 2017-2018 school year, compliance and education inspections were completed at all secondary school sites within the health unit catchment area, including adult learning and alternative school sites. Secondary school administrators continued to request support for issues related to smoking on school property, and sought more information about vaping. TEOs and PHNs from the health unit's Tobacco-Free Living Program were available to meet with students and staff to answer questions around tobacco and vaping, participated in grade assemblies, and provided resources and community contacts to further assist schools with addressing tobacco-related concerns.



SUPPORT TO SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOLS

The SMDHU provided support to local school boards and schools, to assist with the implementation of health-related curricula and identified school health needs. Examples of supports provided by topic include:

Healthy Eating Behaviours and Food Safety

- **School Food and Beverage Policy compliance** at local school boards and schools is supported by public health dietitians and public health inspectors, by request. In 2017-2018, the health unit reviewed applications from 21 food premises wanting to sell food in schools from two school boards. Public health dietitians conducted nutritional assessments and offered supports and resources to the vendors as needed.
- **Student Nutrition Programs** are offered in the majority of elementary and secondary schools across Simcoe Muskoka. These programs provide access to nutritious breakfasts, snacks and/or lunches for students in need. Public health dietitians from the health unit provided regional support for these programs through participation on Simcoe County's Eat Well to Excel Committee and the Muskoka Student Nutrition Program Committee. They also provided consultations to individual schools, as needed, to support local programming.
- **Food safety inspections** were conducted in elementary and secondary schools throughout the 2017-2018 school year to assess compliance with the Ontario Food Premises Regulation. Public health dietitians collaborated with public health inspectors, by attending Student Nutrition Program inspections (where capacity permitted). The dietitians provided advice on healthy food options, shared health unit resources, and reminded schools of the health unit supports available to assist with healthy eating initiatives. Representatives from the SMDHU met with school board officials, as needed, to address concerns resulting from local food safety inspections.
- **Two new resources** were created by the SMDHU in the 2017-2018 school year to support schools in growing and serving healthy foods, while adhering to food safety requirements. These resources were developed in response to ongoing questions from schools related to these topics, and through consultation with representatives from local school boards.



- The “Garden, Grow and Learn” resource provides information on keeping students safe and healthy, while enjoying the benefits of gardening and growing at school.
- The “Menu for Serving up Healthy and Safe Food at School” resource offers practical guidelines for offering healthy and nutritious food options, appropriate for a range of kitchen facilities available in schools.
- **Ontario Food Premises Regulation changes**, which took effect in July 2018, were communicated to local school boards by the SMDHU. Consultations occurred with school board administrators in regards to School Nutrition Programs and the impact of the regulation changes. Communication is ongoing.
- **Safe drinking water** in schools is achieved through an approach that includes strong legislation and health-based standards, on-going monitoring and regular testing of drinking water systems. In the 2017-2018 school year, the health unit responded to 94 adverse water quality incidents reported by schools and child care centres from across the Simcoe Muskoka region, 85 of these were related to adverse lead sampling results.

Healthy Sexuality

- **Professional development** was provided to all secondary school Health and Physical Education leads from one school board by request. Public health nurses delivered a presentation, sharing information and resources related to healthy sexuality, as well as substance use.
- **Sexual health clinics** were provided weekly in three Muskoka area secondary schools. Through these clinics, 223 students accessed one-on-one counselling, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, birth control and other support related to their sexual health. In addition, 226 individual student visits to the clinic occurred for condom pick up.

Infectious Disease Prevention

- **Consultations related to reportable illnesses** were provided by staff from the SMDHU's Infectious Disease Program in response to 155 inquiries received from school administrators, school board staff, parents and teachers.
- **A revised list of diseases of public health significance** was released in 2018. Preliminary information was shared with local school boards to inform of changes in disease reporting process for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year. The notification form, which school administrators (or their designate) are required to complete and submit to the SMDHU when a student has or may have disease of public health significance, has since been updated and is available on the health unit's website.

- **Outbreak investigations** were conducted by the SMDHU, as required, in response to reports of increases in baseline rates of illness within schools. During investigations, health unit staff communicated regularly with school administrators in order to monitor progression of illness among students and staff, and to provide best practice recommendations related to cleaning and disinfection processes.
- **Infection prevention and control complaint investigations** were conducted in response to five school-related calls across all school boards. The Infectious Diseases Program completed risk assessments based on the complaints received. On-site visits to assess the validity of the complaint were also conducted, as needed; if corrective action was required, infection prevention and control recommendations were provided.
- **Inspections were conducted at schools offering personal services** such as hairstyling and aesthetics or cosmetology services. During inspections, public health inspectors assessed for compliance with appropriate infection prevention and control procedures.
- **Infection prevention and control awareness training** was provided by the SMDHU for students enrolled in a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Health and Wellness Programs at 12 secondary schools across Simcoe Muskoka. Certificates of completion were awarded to all participating students.
- **Inspections of school age child care programs**, licensed as child care providers under the Ministry of Education, were also conducted by the SMDHU. Recommendations were provided related to food safety and infection prevention and control (including appropriate cleaning and disinfecting products) for classrooms or school spaces that are shared with child-care programs.

Mental Health Promotion

- Management and staff from the Healthy Schools Program met with the Mental Health Leads at three school boards to discuss current school board programming related to mental health promotion and opportunities to collaborate. The health unit has a variety of programs (described earlier) to support mental health promotion and is looking forward to expanding that menu of services in collaboration with our board partners.

Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour

- **Naturalized play environments at school** accommodate the play interests and abilities of all students, and represent a promising means of getting more children moving in ways that promote physical, social and cognitive health. Health unit staff provided support to one school board and a local conservation authority, as partners in a school-scaping pilot project that began in 2017 and carried into 2018. Five schools were involved in this pilot project. Representatives from the health unit provided support

based on each school's identified needs. As a result of this partnership, the health unit was asked to develop a school grounds guidebook for schools, in an effort to raise awareness among local school communities about opportunities and supports available for school ground naturalization. The development of this resource is now in progress.

- **Outdoor education** offers another opportunity for students (and educators) to be physically active and engage in the outdoor environment during the school day. To support promoting the benefits of outdoor education, public health nurses participated as workshop facilitators at two outdoor learning conferences.

Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction

- **Substance use prevention** was identified by all school boards as a priority public health topic in the 2017-2018 school year, with an emphasis on awareness raising and education for both staff and students.
- **New resources** were created by the SMDHU related to cannabis and opioids, and distributed to schools with the support of school board partners. These resources were developed in response to frequently asked questions received from school administrators and educators related to these topics.
 - “Opioids” and “Cannabis” Frequently Asked Questions resources were created to provide educators with background information, local statistics on youth substance use, and additional resources to support classroom education and student well-being.
 - An “Opioid Overdose” fact sheet was also developed to offer general information about the risk factors and signs associated with opioid overdose, as well as harm reduction information related to Naloxone.
- **Tobacco-free living** (including tobacco, e-cigarettes and vaping) information and supports were provided to schools, by request, in the 2018-2019 school year. Throughout the year, four elementary schools, ten secondary schools and two alternative schools contacted the SMDHU, and public health staff provided support to meet each school's unique needs. For example:
 - presentations for teachers and students about e-cigarettes and vaping
 - meeting with a group of students to discuss tobacco cessation supports and involvement in a school wellness committee
 - providing one-on-one and group cessation supports to students



- providing information and supports for students and parents at a school health fair
- providing information and an interactive display about e-cigarettes and vaping for students and teachers during Mental Health and Addictions week
- working with a group of students to plan an e-cigarette and vaping initiative providing resources related to tobacco prevention and cessation.

Student and Staff Wellness

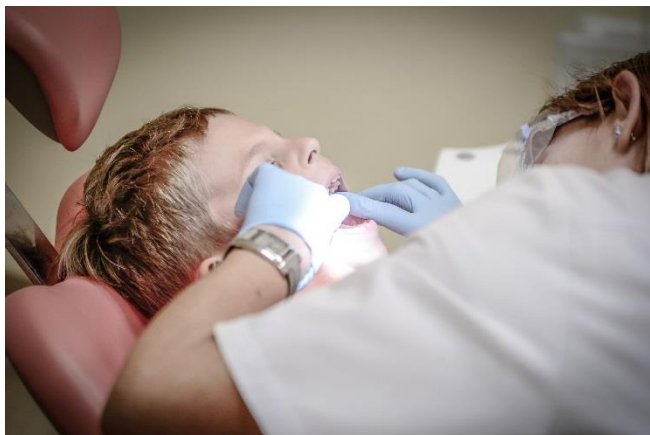
- **Ready for Kindergarten** events were held across Muskoka for families of children entering kindergarten in the fall of 2018. Health unit staff attended these events to share information and answer questions from families related to a variety of public health topics, such as oral health, healthy growth and development, nutrition, among others.
- **Supporting staff wellness** has been identified by local school boards as an important component of promoting overall school health. In 2017-2018, the SMDHU provided support to one school board through consultation with its workplace wellness committee. The school board has demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating comprehensive workplace wellness best-practices into their approach.
- **Health-related policies and procedures** were reviewed by local school boards, in consultation with the SMDHU. Health unit staff provided support to the school boards in revising their health-related policies and procedures, as required, to reflect current evidence and best-practice recommendations.
- **OPHEA Healthy Schools Certification** offers an opportunity for schools to apply comprehensive school health best practices and earn provincial recognition for their efforts. Healthy Schools PHNs provided varying degrees of support to school staff and students as they moved through the six-step process of the Ophea Healthy Schools Certification. Schools received additional points towards their certification for involving public health as a partner.

ORAL HEALTH

Dental screening services were provided in 160 elementary schools across Simcoe Muskoka, in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards – Oral Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol. A total of 24,266 students participated in the elementary dental screening program. This included students from junior and senior kindergarten, Grades 2 and 8; in some schools, where past SMDHU oral health assessment data reflected an increased need for service, Grade 4 and 6 students were also screened. In addition, dental screening services were provided in 13 secondary schools.

1,764 urgent dental concerns requiring additional follow up and case management were identified during screening. All students with identified dental care needs received follow up support from the health unit to ensure care through their family dental provider or publicly funded programs such as [Healthy Smiles Ontario \(HSO\)](#).

Preventive services (such as topical fluoride, pit and fissure sealants, and cleaning) were provided to students at 105 elementary schools, with parental consent.



VISION SCREENING

As of January 1, 2018, public health units in Ontario became responsible for ensuring that school-aged children have access to vision screening services. The health unit engaged in discussions with local school board partners, to inform the SMDHU's planning related to vision screening in Simcoe Muskoka.

As a preliminary step, a survey was conducted with elementary school principals (or designates) to inquire about the current provision of vision screening services in schools. An overall response rate of (85%) was achieved. Results indicated that the majority of schools (78%) do not currently receive vision screening, and that 18% do receive vision screening; 4% of respondents indicated that they were unsure if vision screening occurs.

As a next step in this environmental scan, the health unit plans to connect with organizations that were named by school respondents as being providers of vision screening services.

IMMUNIZATION

School Immunization

In the 2017-2018 school year, the SMDHU provided immunization clinics in elementary schools for students in Grade 7. Students received the Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus (HPV) 9, and Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW vaccines. The first dose of each vaccine was provided in the fall; a second dose of the Hepatitis B and HPV vaccines were provided in the spring. The percentage of students who completed the full series for each of these vaccines is as follows:

Vaccine	Number of students who completed the vaccine series in 2017-2018
Hepatitis B - 2 dose series	72.0%
Human Papillomavirus (HPV) - 2 dose series	66.9%
Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW - 1 dose	89.3%

Surveillance of Student Immunization Records

The SMDHU is responsible for ensuring that children and youth in Simcoe Muskoka have up-to-date immunizations according to the current Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario, and in accordance with the Immunization of School Pupils Act (2014). The health unit is required to collect, assess and maintain immunization records for each student attending school.

During the 2017-2018 school year, surveillance of student immunization records was completed for students in Grade 2 (2010 birth year); students in Grade 8 who had not received vaccination against meningitis (offered in Grade 7); and secondary school students.

- **Immunization notices** (sealed in envelopes) were delivered to elementary schools for distribution to families of students in Grades 2 and 8. The notices advised if a child's immunization record was incomplete and provided options for updating the record. For secondary school students whose records were incomplete, immunization notices were mailed directly from the health unit to students' homes.
- **Suspension orders** were issued by the Medical Officer of Health for elementary students whose records remained incomplete. School principals were required to enforce 566 suspension orders (449 for students in Grade 2 and 117 for students in Grade 8). The Medical Officer of Health did not issue suspension orders for secondary students.

- **Immunization education sessions** became mandatory, effective September 1, 2017, for any parent/guardians who wished to file a Statement of Conscience or Religious Belief form (affidavit) under the Immunizations of School Pupils Act (ISPA) for their child. The education sessions were offered at local health unit offices, and included consultation with a nurse to support informed decision making. A total of 263 education sessions were delivered by the SMDHU during the 2017-2018 school year.
- **A new provincial online immunization reporting system**, Immunization Connect Ontario (ICON), was launched by the SMDHU in 2017. During immunization surveillance, health unit staff encouraged parents/guardians to use ICON to update their child's immunization records. In addition, the SMDHU began working with local school boards to establish processes for encouraging use of ICON as the preferred method for parents/guardians to submit student immunization records to the health unit. The timing of this change was aligned with the school boards' transition to online processes for student registration.

MOVING AHEAD TO 2018-2019

The partnerships between the health unit, school boards and schools in Simcoe Muskoka support the optimal well-being of local children and youth. The SMDHU is committed to continuing to collaborate and strengthen partnerships, with school boards and schools in the 2018-2019 school year.

Key areas of focus for the 2018-2019 school year will include:

- Encouraging active living, outdoor education and healthy outdoor environments
- Promoting positive mental health among school-aged children and youth
- Prevention and education related to opioid and substance use
- Addressing social determinants of health to increase health equity for students and families
- Addressing recent changes to the Ontario Food Premise Regulation.

CONCLUSION

This report summarized the collaborative efforts of the health unit and local school boards during the 2017-2018 school year. The initiatives described provide examples of the partnership and mutual commitment between our organizations to support student health and well-being. To access additional information about any of the initiatives described in this report, please consult the SMDHU website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org or contact the Healthy Schools Program Manager, Cathy Thomson at 705-721-7520, ext. 7469, or cathy.thomson@smdhu.org.



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