

Alert Regarding Risk of Mercury Poisoning from Artisanal Skin Care Products

Attention: Physicians, Emergency Departments, Infection Control Practitioners, Nurse Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Family Health Teams, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN

Date: April 24, 2019

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is alerting health care providers and the public that artisanal skin products (those without labels indicating that they have been made by registered companies) marketed for skin-lightening, anti-aging or for the treatment of acne obtained from out of country can contain harmful ingredients and should be avoided. The caution follows a health unit investigation into a local case of mercury toxicity in a young child in Simcoe Muskoka secondary to the use of such a product by a family member obtained while travelling out of country.

Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal that can be absorbed through the skin, and have long term neurodevelopmental impacts on children. When contained in artisanal products such as skin cream, mercury can easily transfer from containers to skin, other people and items in the home environment. Infants and children are at greatest risk from mercury exposure due to their developing nervous system; very young children can even be at risk if it is actually a family member who has been using the product, given the close skin-to-skin contact of young children with their family members.

Patients can keep themselves and their family safe by:

- avoiding purchasing artisanal cosmetic products marketed as skin-lightening, anti-aging or for treatment of acne when travelling outside of Canada, or on online marketplaces
- reading the ingredient lists on skin care products, and
- immediately discontinuing the use of any suspicious skin care products.

Patients and members of the public can obtain more information on out of country artisanal skin products or mercury by contacting SMDHU via Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or see www.simcoemuskokahealth.org.

Although mercury toxicity is not a reportable condition in Ontario, we would be happy to respond to any enquires on this topic from health care providers at the following point of contact: Healthy Environments Program at 705- 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 extension during business hours or after hours at 1-888-225-7851.

