

Health Care

Health dept.:

It's not 'just' marijuana anymore

In the past 20 years, marijuana growing has undergone a level of sophistication that would make your head spin— especially if you smoked a hydroponically grown joint.

It's not 'just' marijuana' is one of the messages the Halton Region Health Department is emphasizing during Drug Awareness Week, which began Sunday and ends tomorrow (Saturday).

There are many risks associated with using this drug, such as reduced short term learning, reduced motor control and potential lung damage. Other risks are related to the increased THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) levels and possible chemical residue.

Marijuana is the second most commonly used drug, after alcohol, among Ontario students in grade 7 to OAC. According to the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey 2001, almost 30 per cent of students reported using marijuana at least once in the previous 12 months. Of the users, about 21 per cent reported using it 40 or more times in the past 12 months. About 9 per cent of the users reported smoking it daily in the past four weeks. According to the Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment 2002, marijuana is identified as the number one drug by individuals seeking treatment for drug problems in Ontario.

Marijuana is also much stronger than 20 years ago. Growers today are able to concentrate the active ingredient THC. They also use pesticides and growth hormones.

Young people may think they know everything about marijuana, but often make decisions based on misinformation. Parents have a big role to play with regard to modeling low risk behaviour and talking to their kids about drugs. Kids need to hear how risky marijuana can be.

For more information about talking to your kids about drug use, call the Halton Region Health Department at 905-825-6060, ext. 7835.

Cold Rx for kids: Avoid the antibiotics

If your child is feeling sick, use antibiotics with caution. Here's why...

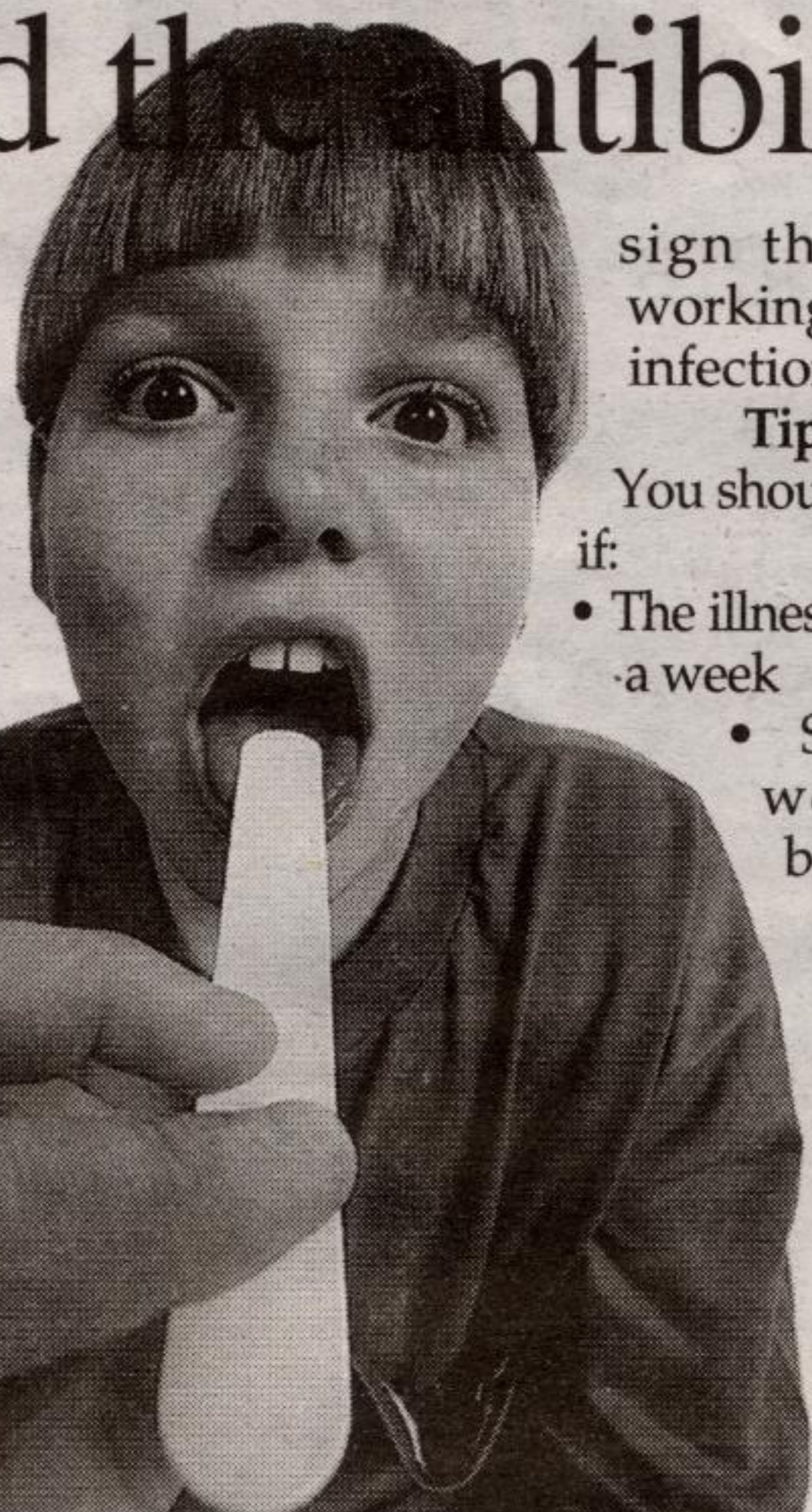
Many children develop colds or come down with the flu in the winter. For the flu, the primary prevention is a flu shot, but for colds, time and parental care is usually the best medicine. Most colds, some sore throats and ear infections are a result of viruses and not bacteria. However, there still is a common misconception that antibiotics are needed for any illness that has fever as a symptom. A fever is a sign that the body is fighting an infection. It is important to remember that antibiotics are not effective against viruses; they are only effective against bacteria.

Children frequently have 10 or more colds per year. Ear infections and fever are also very common. Most fevers and earaches in children are caused by infections that are minor and usually cure themselves. Your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics when they are certain they will help the infection.

The concern with not taking antibiotics properly is the risk of developing an antibiotic resistant bacteria. The misuse of antibiotics is the leading cause of this problem. If you were to take an antibiotic when not needed you would be exposing the normal bacteria in and on your body to the antibiotics. Over time, this exposure can allow bacteria to develop a protection or resistance. This then results in the antibiotic being useless in treat-

ing the infection. As well, antibiotic resistant bacteria can cause more serious illnesses such as skin or blood infections, which can be very difficult to treat.

Antibiotic resistant bacteria have been around for many decades and are more commonly associated with infections in the elderly and people with medical problems who



sign that the body is working to get rid of an infection.

Tips for parents
You should see your doctor if:

- The illness lasts longer than a week
- Symptoms get worse instead of better
- Your child has a fever higher than 39 C (102 F)
- Earache, toothache, sinus pain develops
- A cough gets worse instead of better



require frequent antibiotic treatment. However, there are an increasing number of reports of infections occurring in young children and adults due to antibiotic resistant bacteria. This is a warning sign that antibiotic resistant bacteria are a growing problem that we must deal with now.

Parents should act on the advice given by doctors. If an antibiotic is prescribed, always finish all the medication even though you may feel better after a couple of days. Not finishing all of an antibiotic prescription can also result in bacteria developing resistance. Never share antibiotics or save any for a later use (there should be none left over if taken as prescribed). Don't expect your doctor to prescribe an antibiotic just because you or your child has a fever. A fever is a

remains the best way to stop the spread of viruses and bacteria from person to person. Remember to wash your hands frequently when ill and before eating and after using the bathroom or changing a diaper. Teach children the proper way to wash their hands.

Don't worry about buying even antibacterial scrub, soap, mouthwash, household cleaner and toy. These products may kill some bacteria, but they can also strengthen the resistance in other bacteria. All you need is regular soap and water to keep your home environment healthy.

For more information about antibiotic resistant bacteria, call the Halton Region Health Department, 905-825-6060, ext. 7855 or 1-866-4HALTON or www.region.halton.on.ca/health

Health Notes is prepared by Halton Region Health Department staff.

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