

# MARTHA CURRIE WELLNESS

MARTHA CURRIE ELEMENTARY'S HEALTH & WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

## Let's Get Dirty!

With this weekend's "Courtyard Clean Up" happening at Martha Currie... what a great time to talk about Dirt. The PAC (that's all of us parents!) is spearheading a project to renew our outdoor courtyards allowing the students and staff to use these spaces once again as outdoor classroom areas for gardening, meeting spaces and getting back to nature! Awesome!



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**MAKE MUDPIES**  
**JUMP IN PUDDLES**  
**CLIMB TREES**  
**LIE IN THE GRASS**  
**DREAM BIG**  
**BUILD A FORT**  
**RUN BAREFOOT**  
**SLAY DRAGONS**  
**PLAY IN THE RAIN**  
**REACH FOR THE STARS**  
**IMAGINE**  
**TREAD GENTLY**  
**SLEEP SOUNDLY**

Here we are, approaching the end of the school year which is full of sports, after-school activities, homework, field trips, year-end parties, all our activities of daily living and, also a time that many of us get run down and sick.

As adults we never like the inconvenience of being sick but even worse is when our little ones are not feeling well. We tend to do everything in our power to keep other sick people away so our little ones don't have to deal with the terrible symptoms of runny nose, cough, throwing up, diarrhea, fever and more. Some of us wipe down the grocery cart before we put our kids in the front, carry disinfectant hand gel in our purse and often extensively clean our children's soothers if they hit the floor. I have done all of the above.

But what if exposing our children to dust, dirt, bacteria and parasites are all important to building healthy immune systems? Maybe we are being too clean / hygienic and our children need to get outside, play in dirt more often?



## Could "Dirt" be good for you?

When I studied the lymphatic system in Anatomy and Physiology a few years ago, we learned a few things about the thymus gland. Now you are probably wondering what the heck this has to do with anything... so let me explain.

The thymus gland plays a big part in our immune system and most of us don't even know where the thymus gland is located or what the heck it does... up till a few years ago, neither did I. The thymus gland is located low in the throat and it is in charge of educating our T Cells (white blood cells), which are critical cells of the adaptive immune system. As antigens (toxins, foreign proteins, or bacteria) enter the body, T cells are trained by the thymus gland for each specific antigen that enters our bodies. This is where it gets interesting. If the more your body is exposed to foreign substances the more "specific" T cells your body makes; this would mean that eventually you would build up a pretty good army of T cells. What is even more interesting to me was that the thymus starts to degrade in our 20's and 30's (being replaced by fatty tissue) and eventually stops producing new T cells.

Any new foreign substances introduced into our body after our thymus stops functioning do not get a T cell specifically trained to fight it off. Kind of makes you think twice about all those childhood illnesses you had.

Maybe being sick as a child is not much fun but if it is training our body to fight for a good future...then maybe the odd flu, dirty door knob or cracker dropped on the floor is not such a bad thing after all? There is a lot of talk about "today's Children" and how their immune systems aren't exposed to the large numbers of pathogens and toxins they once were. Maybe this has something to do with the dramatic increase of allergies. It is also said that people who have pets in their home help to increase children's immune system as dogs can bring many bacteria into the home.





David Suzuki says "Getting dirty may be healthy." He talks about how we have become increasingly urbanized and many of us have moved away from nature. David said "they found people surrounded by a greater diversity of life (outdoors) were themselves covered with a wider range of different kinds of microbes than those in less diverse surroundings. They were also less likely to exhibit allergies."

David also says that "To work effectively, our immune system needs to be "primed" by exposure to a diverse range of organisms at an early age. In this way, it learns to distinguish between good, bad and harmless".

It is all starting to come together now. The importance of the thymus gland, the immune system, nature, biodiversity and our exposure to toxins and bacteria (dirt).

So let's get outside more, worry less about your home being perfect and avoid antibacterial products, your immune system will thank you for it.



## Hope to see you at the "Courtyard Clean up!"

- When: Saturday May 14
- Where: Martha Currie: 10am - 4pm
- Who: PAC - All Parents
- What: Courtyard Clean up
- Why: Help get these areas ready for planting, playing and learning!
- Bring: Shovels, power washers, garden gloves and a desire to get dirty!

## More articles to check out:

<http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/2014/making-a-mud-kitchen>

<http://wellnessmama.com/12908/kids-need-dirt/>

<http://theartofsimple.net/let-your-kids-get-dirty/>

<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/soil-fertilizers/antidepressant-microbes-soil.htm>

## Books to check out

The last Child in the woods: Richard Louv (Awesome Book)!!!

Rest, Play, Grow: Deborah MacNamara

<http://macnamara.ca/book/>