



**Northwestern  
Health Unit**

[www.nwhu.on.ca](http://www.nwhu.on.ca)

For Immediate Release  
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### **Local Youth at Risk for Deadly Disease**

Low coverage rates of the vaccine for preventing meningococcal disease has Northwestern Health Unit staff concerned about a potential outbreak. In some Northwestern Health Unit communities, as few as 1/3 of the students have received their vaccine (brand name Menactra). Dr. Jim Arthurs, Medical Officer of Health states that "local youth are at risk of a preventable and potentially fatal outbreak of meningitis in the next few years. Parents need to take this risk seriously and get their children immunized."

Meningitis (a brain or blood infection) does not happen often – about 300 cases per year across Canada - but the consequences are serious. "When people do get sick, they get sick fast, and about 10% will die," Arthurs notes. "Of those who do not die, 10% will suffer long-term complications including deafness, brain damage, nervous system disorders or limb amputation."

Bacteria (germs) that safely live in the throat of many of us can cause a very serious infection if they are able to get into the blood or brain fluid. Sports team members, high school and college or university students are at higher risk from activities as simple as taking a sip from someone's drink, sharing lip balm or musical instrument mouthpieces, or kissing.

A vaccine prevents several common strains of the germ that causes meningitis. The vaccine is offered free of charge to grade 7 students through school-based clinics every year. Consent forms go home with the children from school and must be signed by a parent or guardian and returned to the school.

If you have a child who is currently in grade 7 or has finished grade 7 in the past several years check to make sure he or she has received the vaccine for meningococcal disease.

Help reduce the risk of this fatal infection. Families whose children did not receive the Meningococcal vaccine (brand name Menactra) should contact the local office of the Northwestern Health Unit to arrange for their child or children to get the vaccine or call toll-free 1-866-468-2240.

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