



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

For immediate release
October 10, 2017

Invasive Group A Streptococcus Infections on the Rise

The Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) has seen an increase in the number of cases of Invasive Group A streptococcus (iGAS) infections. These rates are higher than usual, and data shows the rates tend to rise further during the winter months.

Group A streptococcus (GAS) is a bacteria commonly found in the throat or on the skin. Many healthy people carry the bacteria and have no signs of illness. Dr. Kit Young-Hoon, Medical Officer of Health at NWHU further explains, "The majority of GAS infections cause relatively mild illnesses like strep throat and impetigo. However, an invasive GAS infection is a serious and sometimes life-threatening illness that occurs when the bacteria invades a part of the body where it is not usually found".

Symptoms of an iGAS infection include fever, severe body aches, chills, sore throat, dizziness, confusion, or rash. There may also be severe pain, redness or swelling around a wound or injured area. "A person with iGAS can become very ill within a few hours. If someone has these symptoms, it is important to see a health care provider immediately," urges Dr. Kit Young-Hoon.

To protect yourself and others from an iGAS infection, the public can follow these preventive measures:

- Wash your hands regularly especially after coughing or sneezing and before handling or eating food.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; use a tissue or your sleeve, not your hands.
- Make sure your immunizations are up to date, including the annual flu shot.
- Avoid activities where you may have come into contact with someone else's body fluids such as open mouth kissing and sharing cups/water bottles, utensils, or needles.
- People diagnosed with strep throat should stay home from work, school, or child care until 24 hours after taking an antibiotic.
- Keep all wounds clean, and watch for possible signs of infection such as rapid increase in redness, swelling, drainage, and pain at the wound site. Anyone with signs of an infected wound, especially if fever develops, should seek medical care right away. People diagnosed with a skin infection requiring oral antibiotics should also stay home from work, school or child care until after starting antibiotics.
- If you've been in close contact with a person who has recently had invasive GAS disease, see your health care provider. You may need preventative antibiotics.

Those who are most at risk for an iGAS infection include people with pre-existing skin conditions, wounds, chronic diseases such as diabetes, individuals with compromised immune systems, individuals who use injection drugs, those who use alcohol excessively, and homeless/under-housed individuals.



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

For immediate release

October 10, 2017

Invasive Group A Streptococcus Infections on the Rise

page 2

NWHU continues to investigate the increase of iGAS infections and will provide updates to the public as more information becomes available. For more information on iGAS, visit www.nwhu.on.ca or call 1-800-830-5978.

-30-

Media Contact:

Dr. Kit Young-Hoon, Medical Officer of Health

Northwestern Health Unit

210 First Street North

Kenora, ON P9N 2K4

(807) 468-3147

(807) 468-7109 (after hours)