

November 20, 2023

Public Health Alert – Increase in cases of iGAS

Situation:

Northwestern Health Unit has been seeing an increase in invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease (iGAS) cases in our region recently, with spikes in the past few months. The majority of cases have been identified in the Sioux Lookout (including Northern First Nations) and Kenora areas, but cases are occurring around the region. Cases are being seen in all age ranges, with most cases occurring in adults aged 25 and over.

Risk factors for recent cases have been consistent with local risk factors over time. These include having chronic illness or underlying medical conditions, wounds or dermatological conditions, diabetes, injection drug use, and homelessness or being underhoused.

Increase risk of iGAS also exists in: infants and children under 4; people who are pregnant or postpartum; older adults; and those who are immunocompromised.

Actions requested:

Prompt assessment and treatment of non-invasive GAS and remaining alert for signs and symptoms of iGAS, particularly for those at increased risk.

Educate patients on the signs and symptoms of serious bacterial infections and when to seek urgent medical attention.

Promote routine vaccinations including varicella and influenza for eligible patients. Severe illness from GAS in other areas has often followed respiratory infections and iGAS is known to correlate with recent chickenpox infection.

More information about iGAS in Ontario can be found on [Public Health Ontario's website](#).

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