

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

January 19, 2024

Increased risk of Invasive Meningococcal Disease and Invasive Group A Streptococcus Infections in Manitoba

Manitoba Health has noted a recent increase in cases of Invasive Meningococcal Disease (IMD) and Invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) infections in Manitoba. This increases the risk in northwestern Ontario due to frequent travel between our region and Manitoba. The Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) area does regularly have higher iGAS rates than the rest of Ontario and is not currently seeing an increase in IMD the region. NWHU asks the public to be aware of the signs and symptoms of the illnesses and make sure they are up to date with eligible vaccinations.

IMD is a serious bacterial infection that spreads through respiratory droplets and saliva, through close prolonged contact. About 10% of people who carry the bacteria that cause IMD do not get sick but can still spread it to others. Symptoms can include high fever, stiff neck, severe headache, drowsiness or confusion, sensitivity to light, severe aches and pains, nausea and vomiting, limb or joint pain and/or a dark purple rash. IMD can cause long term neurological impacts, amputation, and death.

Group A Streptococci are bacteria regularly found in the throat and skin. Most infections caused by these bacteria are mild and include illnesses such as strep throat and impetigo. However, iGAS disease can cause severe outcomes such as necrotizing fasciitis (flesh eating disease) streptococcal toxic shock syndrome and even death. IGAS can cause a wide range of symptoms such as feeling unwell, fevered, or severe pain in an area of their body. With iGAS, an infection can increase in size and pain rapidly. Other symptoms can include a rash, stiff neck and headache, or confusion and low blood pressure.

For both diseases early and quick treatment with antibiotics and other care is important.

Things you can do include:

- Get vaccinated!
 - Ontario's immunization schedule offers vaccines to protect against IMD for infants at 12 months, and children in Grade 7. Northwestern Health Unit nurses will be in the schools over the coming months. If you have received notice your student is due, please contact us about getting them up to date.
 - Anyone born 1997 or later is eligible for this vaccine. If you are unsure of your vaccination history, email us at vaccines@nwhu.on.ca

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- Anyone in these high-risk groups can also get vaccinated:
 - ♦ HIV
 - ♦ Asplenia
 - ♦ Cochlear implant recipients (pre/post implant)
 - ♦ Acquired complement deficiencies
 - ♦ Complement, properdin factor D or primary antibody deficiencies
- Immunization against Influenza, COVID-19, and Pneumococcal helps to reduce the risk of having serious secondary bacterial infections, such as IMD and iGAS
- Seek medical attention if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms and they are new or worsening.
- Tell your health care provider about any travel or exposure to someone with a severe infection when seeking care.

For more information visit the [Ontario Ministry of Health Meningococcal disease page](#) or [Health Canada's Group A streptococcal diseases page](#).

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