

## INVASIVE MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE (IMD)

### What is invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)?

IMD is a rare but serious disease caused by the bacteria, *Neisseria meningitidis*. It can cause meningitis (an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or septicaemia (a serious blood infection).

### What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms are rapid in onset and include fever, headache, stiff neck (unwillingness to move head up and down), nausea and vomiting. People with this disease are visibly sick and may be confused, irritable or drowsy. Sometimes a red skin rash will appear that is flat and smooth. Some may experience permanent hearing loss, skin scarring, mental delays or death.

### How is IMD spread?

The bacteria that cause IMD are quite common and live in the back of the nose and throat of about 10% of the population. The disease is spread person-to-person by droplets (sneeze or cough) in the air or direct contact with secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person such as by sharing cigarettes, lipstick, food or drinks, cups, water bottles, drinking straws, toothbrushes, toys (that have been in the mouth), musical instruments with mouthpieces.

### Who is at most risk?

Most people who come in contact with the bacteria do not become sick. Why one person becomes ill and others do not is unknown. It is most common in children under 5 years of age, adolescents, and young adults who live in college and university dormitories. Those who are close contacts of a case are also at higher risk of becoming sick.

### How long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

A person with meningococcal disease is considered to be infectious from 7 days before he/she becomes ill and up to 24 hours following the beginning of antibiotics.

### Who is considered a close contact?

Close contacts are persons living in the same household, attending the same child care or nursery school, or other people who may have shared saliva (spit) with the sick person. This could be through kissing, sharing toys, foods, drinks or cigarettes. Casual contacts (classmates or fellow workers) are not at increased risk.

### Is there treatment for IMD?

Most people with meningococcal disease recover with antibiotics.

### Can IMD be prevented?

There are three meningococcal vaccines that are publicly funded and available in Ontario. They each protect people from different strains (types) of the bacteria. Meningococcal C conjugate vaccine is routinely given to babies and young children. It only protects against one type of the IMD (type C). Another type of vaccine protects people from 9 months to 55 years of age. This meningococcal ACYW-135 vaccine protects against 4 different types of IMD and is routinely given to grade 7 students in Ontario. The third vaccine is for meningococcal type B and has been approved for use in children from 2 months to 17 years of age, however, it is only publicly funded for children with specific high risk conditions. Discuss with your doctor what vaccine is best for your situation.

### What is Peel Public Health's advice for contacts of a case of IMD?

Watch for signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease. In some cases, Peel Public Health may advise close contacts who are considered to be at increased risk (shared saliva) to take antibiotics and/or vaccine to prevent illness.

**For further information, talk to your doctor or call Peel Public Health at 905-799-7700.**