



February 2, 2015

RE: Bacterial Meningitis

Dear Students and Parents:

A student who attended Acadia University has recently passed away with bacterial meningitis. Public Health is working with the laboratory to try and identify the type and strain of bacteria.

Public Health takes any bacterial meningitis seriously. We are in the process of identifying people who may have been exposed and contacting them directly. This disease does not spread through the air or through casual exposure, so risk to students attending Acadia University of contracting the disease is low.

The bacteria that can cause meningitis are spread by direct secretions from the nose and mouth through activities such as kissing, and sharing food, drinks, and water bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or cigarettes.

This illness is not spread by sitting next to someone, taking a class with someone, or walking in the halls with someone who is sick with the illness.

Symptoms of bacterial meningitis may include changes in level of alertness, fever, headache, stiff neck, a rash, or sensitivity to light. Public Health recommends seeking medical attention immediately if you become ill with any of these symptoms.

If you or your family doctor requires further information, or if you are concerned that you may have been directly exposed, please contact Public Health toll free at 1-844-468-6805.

For more information on bacterial meningitis, see the attached information sheet.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Strang

Acting Regional Medical Officer of Health
AVDHA

Bacterial Meningitis

What Is Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial Meningitis is an infection that is spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person. The infection can be in the blood (meningococemia) or in the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis).

Who Can Get Bacterial Meningitis?

Anyone can get bacterial meningitis. It is spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose and mouth through activities such as kissing, sharing food, drinks, water bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or cigarettes.

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- fever
- headache
- change in the level of alertness and/or altered mental state
- stiff neck
- rash
- nausea
- vomiting
- increased sensitivity to light

What is the Treatment?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with antibiotics. Early diagnosis and treatment are important. If symptoms occur, contact your family doctor or visit the nearest emergency department to you immediately.

How can Bacterial Meningitis be Prevented?

- Reduce direct contact and exposure to discharges from nose and mouth (e.g. coughing, kissing, sharing utensils, drinking glasses, cigarettes, etc.)
- Reduce overcrowding in living quarters and workplaces (e.g. barracks, dormitories, sleep away camps, ships, etc.)
- Immunize following the Nova Scotia Immunization Schedule
- Follow hand hygiene practices using plain or antimicrobial soap with running water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

What if I had contact with the individual who had been diagnosed with bacterial meningitis?

Only those who had close contact with the individual may need further assessment.

A close contact in this case may be defined as:

- Household contacts of the case (in residence settings, this means a roommate)
- Persons who share sleeping arrangements with the case
- Persons who have direct contamination of their nose or mouth with the oral/nasal secretions of the case (i.e. kissing on the mouth, shared cigarettes, shared drinking bottles, etc.)
- Health care workers (HCWs) who have had intensive unprotected contact (without wearing a mask) with infected individual (i.e. intubating, resuscitating or closely examining the oropharynx)

Bacterial meningitis is not spread by sitting next to someone, talking with someone, being in the same room with someone who has the illness or by simply breathing the air in a room where the person has been.

If I am a close contact, what should I do?

Contact Public Health toll free at 1-844-468-6805.