

Okanagan Meningitis Outbreak- December 19, 2017

You may have heard about the Meningitis Outbreak in the media that has been declared in the Okanagan region and are looking for information about it. The outbreak is being directed and managed by Interior Health Authority.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. It is usually caused by an infection.

The infection occurs most often in children, teens, and young adults. Also at risk are older adults and people who have long-term health problems, such as a weakened [immune system](#).

There are two main kinds of meningitis:

- **Viral meningitis** is fairly common. It usually doesn't cause serious illness. In severe cases, it can cause prolonged fever and seizures.
 - **Bacterial meningitis** isn't as common, but it's very serious. It needs to be treated right away to prevent brain damage and death.
-

What causes meningitis?

Viral meningitis is caused by viruses. Bacterial meningitis is caused by bacteria.

Meningitis can also be caused by other organisms and some medicines, but this is rare.

Meningitis is contagious. The germs that cause it can be passed from one person to another through coughing and sneezing and through close contact.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms among *teens and young adults* are:

- A stiff and painful neck, especially when you try to touch your chin to your chest.
- Fever.
- Headache.
- Vomiting.
- Trouble staying awake.
- Seizures.

Children, older adults, and people with other medical problems may have different symptoms:

- Babies may be cranky and refuse to eat. They may have a rash. They may cry when held.
- Young children may act like they have the flu. They may cough or have trouble breathing.
- Older adults and people with other medical problems may have only a slight headache and fever.

It is very important to see a doctor right away if you or your child has these symptoms. Only a doctor can tell whether they are caused by viral or bacterial meningitis. And bacterial meningitis can be deadly if not treated right away.

How is it treated?

Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics in a hospital. You may also get dexamethasone, a type of [steroid medicine](#). And you will be watched carefully to prevent serious problems such as hearing loss, seizures, and brain damage.

But viral meningitis is more common, and most people with this form of the illness get better in about 2 weeks. With mild cases, you may only need home treatment. Home treatment includes taking medicine for fever and pain and drinking enough fluids to stay hydrated.

Can meningitis be prevented?

The best way to protect your child from meningitis is to make sure he or she gets all the standard immunizations for children. These include shots for measles, chickenpox, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib) disease, and pneumococcal infection.

In B.C., the Meningitis vaccine is a part of the routine infant series, as well as part of the Grade 9 school program. It is important to keep your child up to date on immunizations.

For more detailed information, you can visit Health Link BC for the latest Public Health alerts, as well as information about Meningitis.

Health Link BC: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

***Right now, only students age 15-19 who live in the Okanagan (or attend school there, such as university or college), are being offered a catch up vaccine program for those who missed their Grade 9 Meningitis vaccine. To see a list of Public Health Clinics, please go to:**

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/Pages/default.aspx> (Go to “Alerts and Reports” and “What’s Happening” on Home page)

Other Contact Information:

For other information on the Meningitis Outbreak, you can also call or go to the following website:

- **First Nations Health Authority:** <http://www.fnha.ca/>
- **24 Hr BC Nurse Line:** Dial 811
- **Salmon Arm Public Health Unit:** (250) 833-4100
- **Chase Public Health Unit:** (250) 679-1393
- **Kamloops Public Health Unit:** (250) 851-7300