Q&A

Meningococcal disease outbreak ends

Q1. When did Interior Health declare the outbreak? When will it end?
The meningococcal disease outbreak among 15-19 year olds in the Okanagan was declared on December 14, 2017. Assuming no further cases of meningococcal disease are reported in the Okanagan within the next seven days, Interior Health is expecting to end the outbreak on February 13, 2018.

Q2. What happens if more cases of meningococcal disease appear in the Okanagan?
It is unlikely for additional cases of meningococcal disease to appear, however, if an additional case is identified, as per normal process, Interior Health will conduct an investigation to determine close contacts and provide antibiotics and vaccine, if required. Further public health action will depend on the case, and as always, Interior Health will continue to manage the occurrence of disease on a case-by-case basis and monitor for higher than expected rates/number of cases in any population.

Q3. What can I do to avoid future meningococcal disease outbreaks?
The best way to prevent future outbreaks of meningococcal disease is by not sharing drinks, straws, cutlery, or items you would put in your mouth, with others. Interior Health also suggests staying up-to-date with routine immunizations so you are protected against meningococcal disease and other illnesses.

Q4. How many people did you immunize? Is that more or less than what you expected?
Since the December 14, approximately 12,000 individuals have been immunized against meningococcal disease. The overall rate of immunization is within the range that we expected.

Until the outbreak is declared over, we are continuing to encourage all 15-19 year olds who live in the Okanagan to get immunized. We are urging those people who are 18 and 19, in particular, to get immunized as the uptake in this age group has been lower than others.

Q5. Is the Okanagan adequately protected against this disease?
The Okanagan will be better protected against meningococcal disease than any other region of BC.
Q6. What is the last day for eligible Okanagan residents can receive the vaccine for free?
The day the outbreak is declared the over, free vaccine for 15-19 year old residents in BC will end. Interior Health expects to declare an end to the outbreak on February 13, assuming no additional cases are reported from February 5-12, 2018. After the outbreak ends, routine immunizations for grade nine students will continue, as part of BC’s childhood immunization program.

Q7. Who is eligible for the vaccine after February 13?
All grade nine students in BC will be eligible for the Meningococcal Quadrivalent vaccine, as part of the routine immunization program.

Q8. How many cases of meningococcal disease were reported in 2017?
A total of 12 cases of invasive meningococcal disease were reported in 2017. Among these, 10 were due to serogroup W. Serogroup B and Y were also reported. The majority of cases occurred in the Okanagan.

Q9. Where can I find more information about meningococcal disease and the Meningococcal Quadrivalent vaccine in BC?
For more information on meningococcal disease, visit HealthLink BC. If you have questions about how to obtain a vaccine, visit interiorhealth.ca.