

Meningococcal Disease in Toronto

Video Script

Slide 1: Protecting Yourself from Meningococcal Disease

In August 2022, Toronto Public Health declared a meningococcal outbreak in the city. This video presentation will tell you more about meningococcal disease and how people can protect themselves by getting vaccinated.

If you are between the ages of 20 and 36, Toronto Public Health is encouraging you to check your immunization record for the meningococcal vaccine. If you have not had the vaccine then get one as soon as possible. The vaccine is free and available from your health care provider or at a City-run vaccination clinics. Appointments can be booked online at www.TPHBookings.ca.

Slide 2: Land Acknowledgement

This video is being recorded on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Slide 3: Meningococcal Disease Outbreak in Toronto

On August 25, 2022, Toronto Public Health confirmed three cases of invasive bacterial meningococcal disease in Toronto.

The three people were between 20 and 30 years old and were not vaccinated against meningococcal disease. They were born outside of Canada in countries that do not provide publically-funded childhood meningococcal vaccination. Sadly one person died.

Toronto Public Health has not been able to identify a link between these cases. However, all three people had the same strain of serogroup C meningococcal disease.

Slide 4: What is Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

Some people can carry this bacteria in their throat or nose without getting sick. In some rare cases, the bacteria overcome the body's natural defenses and make the person seriously sick. Illness can include an infection in the brain, spinal cord and/or blood, as well as complications such as hearing loss, brain damage, loss of limbs and even death.

Meningococcal disease can affect people of any age but it's most common in children under five years old, teens and young adults who are not vaccinated against the disease.

Slide 5: How it Spreads

Meningococcal disease spreads through direct, close contact with saliva from the mouth or mucus from the nose of someone who has the disease. It can spread through kissing, coughing or sneezing, as well as sharing food, drinks, toothbrushes, cigarettes, lipstick, or other things that have been in the mouth of a person who has the disease. It can also spread by living in the same household with someone who has meningococcal disease. The bacteria is not spread through casual contact or by breathing air where someone with meningococcal disease has been.

A person can spread meningococcal disease up to seven days before becoming sick and until 24 hours after starting the appropriate antibiotic.

Anyone who has been in close contact with a person who has meningococcal disease is at risk.

Slide 6: Symptoms

Symptoms may start between 2 to 10 days after being exposed to the bacteria, but between 3 to 4 days is typical.

Symptoms include: sudden high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, drowsiness or confusion, nausea or vomiting, a purplish rash that spreads quickly, increased sensitivity to light, or seizures. Two images of what the rash may look like are to the right.

See a health care provider right away if you have severe symptoms or develop symptoms within 10 days of being in close contact with a person who has meningococcal disease.

Treatment includes antibiotics which can prevent you from getting sick and spreading the bacteria. In some cases the meningococcal vaccine may be used as well.

Toronto Public Health follows up and provides guidance to anyone who lives in Toronto that has meningococcal disease, as well as their close contacts.

Slide 7: Getting Vaccinated is Your Best Protection

The meningococcal vaccine provides strong protection against specific types of meningococcal bacteria. You cannot get the disease from the vaccine because it does not contain live bacteria.

The vaccine is safe and effective. Common side effects include pain and redness where the vaccine was given, headache, as well as feeling tired or unwell for a short time after getting the vaccine.

In rare cases, serious allergic reactions such as trouble breathing, rash, as well as swelling in the throat and face may occur. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. There are no long-term side effects from this vaccine.

Slide 8: Check Your Immunization Record

Toronto Public Health is strongly advising adults between 20 to 36 years of age who have not received a dose of meningococcal vaccine to contact a health care provider or book an appointment at a City-run clinic to get this free vaccine.

If you got the meningococcal vaccine when you were a baby or young child but didn't get one when you were a teenager, we recommend getting vaccinated as soon as possible. If you don't know your vaccination history then you should get the vaccine just in case – it is safe to do so.

The vaccine is free – even if you don't have OHIP, health insurance or immigration status. A piece of ID is needed to confirm your age. You can get the meningococcal vaccine at the same time as other vaccines, such as flu or COVID-19 vaccines.

Slide 9: Need Health Advice?

We are now going to talk about where you can get more information, including health and vaccine advice.

Telehealth is now called Health Connect Ontario and can be reached by phone at 811 or through online chat. This free service connects you to a registered nurse day or night for confidential health advice. You can check your symptoms, as well as get health recommendations and referrals. OHIP is not required.

Slide 10: Need Vaccine Advice?

Scarborough Health Network's VaxFacts Clinic provides one-on-one consultation with a doctor for accurate information about a variety of vaccines, including the meningococcal vaccine. This service is available by appointment for residents across Canada.

Slide 11: Need More Information?

Thank you for watching! If you would like more information, please visit our webpage or call the Toronto Public Health Hotline at 416-338-7600. We are open Monday to Friday, from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.