

December 5, 2019

Dear Anglophone South School District Staff and Parents,

Public Health has recently been made aware of suspected viral meningitis in several students within our health region. While sporadic cases of viral meningitis are expected, confusion can occur when the difference between viral and bacterial meningitis is not well understood. Please take time to review the information on both viral and bacterial meningitis below. Note that while this fact sheet provides important information, it should not replace timely consultation with your health care provider should your child have symptoms. Should you have further questions or concerns please contact your health care provider, local Public Health Office or Tele-Care 811.

#### **What Is Meningitis?**

Meningitis is inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord, usually caused by an infection. The infection is most commonly found in children, teens and young adults.

#### **Types of Meningitis**

**Viral**-Viral meningitis is common and can be caused by a wide variety of viruses. Anti-biotics will not help clear the infection. In most cases, viral meningitis does not cause severe illness and most people will recover within 2 weeks with supportive treatment only - keeping hydrated and taking medication for fever or headache. No school exclusion is required.

**Bacterial**-Bacterial meningitis is less common and is caused by meningococcus bacteria. Many people carry the bacteria at the back of their throat or nose without any ill effects. In rare cases, bacterial meningitis can cause serious illness that requires rapid treatment with antibiotics to prevent complications.

#### **How is it spread?**

Most forms of meningitis are contagious and can be passed from person to person through direct contact with droplets from the nose or throat (saliva) of an infected person. Kissing, coughing, sneezing and sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, water bottles, cigarettes, or lipstick can spread the infection.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

**In teens and young adults, the most common symptoms are:**

Stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever, trouble staying awake, occasionally seizures rash and eye sensitivity.

**In small children, older adults or people with weakened immune systems symptoms are:**

Babies may experience irritability, excessive crying and difficulty feeding.

Young children may show flu like symptoms, a cough or difficulty breathing.

Older adults or people with weakened immune systems may only have a slight fever and headache.

#### **Prevention**

Be sure your child has received all their routine childhood immunizations.

Wash your hands frequently, cover your coughs and sneezes, stay home when you are sick and avoid sharing of drinks, food, utensils, water bottles, mouth guards, lipstick, etc.

Symptoms can develop rapidly so if your child develops any of these signs it is important to see a doctor for evaluation and treatment if needed.

Thank you,



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Medical Officer of Health  
South Region

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#### **Department of Health**

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