

For Immediate Release | December 14, 2017

IH expands meningococcal disease immunization clinics in the Okanagan

Immunization clinics for all Okanagan residents aged 15-19 begin today

KELOWNA—Today, Interior Health announced they are offering immunization clinics throughout the Okanagan for individuals in grades 9-12 and persons aged 15-19 years old who do not attend school.

Over the past six months, Interior Health has seen an increasing number of cases of meningococcal disease in this age group, and as a result is declaring an outbreak. In 2017, Interior Health has identified 11 cases of meningococcal disease—a majority of these cases were in the Okanagan. Typically, the health authority will see less than five cases per year.

“The risk to the general population is low,” said Dr. Karin Goodison, Medical Health Officer. “However, with the increase in the number of cases and the fact that this disease can be prevented through immunization, we felt it important to raise the public’s awareness about this disease, and roll out a campaign to immunize those at the highest risk.”

“Immunization is the best form of defence against this disease,” said Goodison. “We are encouraging all people in this age group who live in the Okanagan, to get immunized.”

The Meningococcal Quadrivalent vaccine has been part of the routine immunization schedule for BC students in grade 9 since 2016. If you have received this vaccine as part of the grade 9 immunization program in 2016/2017, you do not need to be re-immunized. Parents and individuals with questions about their immunization records can call their local health centre.

“As a parent myself, I understand there may be concern and questions,” said Dr. Goodison. “I would encourage parents to visit the Interior Health website to learn more about this disease, signs and symptoms, and to find out when a clinic will be available in their area.” Parents and students may also speak with their health-care provider.

Immunizations started today at a school in Vernon and clinics will continue to roll out at Okanagan schools next week to ensure immunization before winter holidays. Interior Health will also be offering immunization at public health centres for people who are not attending school or who have missed their school immunization clinic. Please check interiorhealth.ca for more details.

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection that occurs rarely in Canada that is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or close face-to-face contact. It can also spread through saliva. This can occur through activities such as kissing or sharing of food, drinks, cigarettes, lipsticks, water bottles, mouth guards used for sports, or mouthpieces of musical instruments.

For more information about the Meningococcal Quadrivalent vaccine, visit HealthLink BC.

To find an immunization clinic near you, visit interiorhealth.ca.

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