

## **Health Unit offering meningitis vaccine in schools**

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Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health is once again offering meningococcal (Meningitis C) vaccine clinics in high schools and to grade 7 students. Clinics will be held in February for high school students, and will start in March for grade 7 students. Information will be sent home with students who are eligible for the meningitis vaccine funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Students who have been previously immunized do not need to be re-vaccinated.

"The meningitis C vaccine is the most effective way to protect our teens from a serious and potentially deadly disease. It protects against the strain of meningitis that caused an outbreak in Waterloo in 1998, which resulted in mass immunization," notes Susan Otten, program manager of the Vaccine Preventable Disease team.

Of the many strains of meningitis, the meningitis group C is one of the most serious. Meningitis C has caused most outbreaks and clusters of meningitis in schools and communities in Canada. "Up to 10% of healthy people carry the bacteria that cause meningitis C in their noses and throats. The disease can spread through direct contact with an infected person's saliva or fluid from the nose." says Otten. "Teens are at higher risk because they share food, drinks, water bottles, cigarettes and kisses. Such habits make them more likely to spread the disease."

In rare cases, the bacteria overcome the body's natural defences and cause serious illness that can be fatal. About 10% of people who develop the disease will die. In addition, about 20% of those who recover will have long-term complications such as hearing loss, kidney problems, brain damage, and amputation of one or more limbs.

For clinic dates and more information about meningitis C and the vaccine, call Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health at 1-800-265-7293 or visit [www.wdghu.org](http://www.wdghu.org).