

## Increased Invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease (iGAS) in Ontario

**Attention:** Physicians, Hospitals, CNO, ER Manager, ER Physician, Infection Control Practitioners, Community Health Centre, Walk-In Urgent Care Clinic, Nurse Practitioner, Ontario Health, Ontario Health Teams, Midwives, Family Health Team, Indigenous Healthcare & Community, Long Term Care, Retirement Home

**Date:** December 19, 2023

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The number of Invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease (iGAS) cases reported in Ontario this season has been higher in both adults and children compared to the Fall 2022, with the highest rates of illness in adults 65 years and older and children aged 1-9 years. Throughout Simcoe Muskoka, 104 cases of iGAS have been reported in 2023 to date. This is a significant increase from 2022, in which 41 cases were reported. The 5-year (2018-2022) average for Simcoe Muskoka is 41 cases per year. The case fatality rate in 2023 is currently 11%, which is similar to the last 2 pandemic years but remains higher than the pre-pandemic fatality rate of 5% of cases. This is especially concerning with the imminent start to the influenza season and ongoing incidence of COVID-19 infections, given that recent viral infection is a risk factor for iGAS. Similar increases have been observed in other provinces/territories and countries.

While iGAS remains relatively uncommon and with varying clinical presentations, it can progress very quickly and be associated with severe illness including sepsis, soft-tissue necrosis, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, meningitis, pneumonia, or other life-threatening conditions resulting in death. As a result, early recognition and prompt aggressive management are critical.

Preceding signs and symptoms can include fever, upper respiratory tract infection symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, rash and severe pain. Clinicians should provide prompt assessment and treatment for individuals with symptoms of non-invasive GAS (e.g. pharyngitis with consistent findings, skin and soft tissue infections).

We ask that you please be on the alert for potential complications of GAS infections and consider iGAS as a possible cause of severe illness, especially in those who may be at increased risk including:

- Infants and young children
- People who are pregnant or postpartum
- Older adults 65 years and older
- Immunocompromised individuals
- People with wounds, conditions causing breaks in the skin, or recent surgery
- People experiencing homelessness and/or using injection drugs
- Individuals with recent viral infection (e.g. influenza, chickenpox)



If iGAS is suspected, please obtain appropriate specimens for routine bacterial cultures or DNA detection by nucleic acid amplification testing (NAAT) and, if possible, consider early consultation with an infectious diseases specialist in severe cases. It is important to educate patients and/or parents/guardians on the signs and symptoms of serious bacterial infections and when to seek urgent medical attention. We also appreciate you supporting patients to stay up to date on routine immunizations for which they are eligible (e.g. influenza, chickenpox, COVID-19).

If you have any questions or to report a disease of public health significance, including iGAS, please contact the Infectious Diseases Team at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. 8809 during business hours or after hours at 1-888-225-7851.