

# **Important updates about iGAS cases, Mpox and annual influenza immunization for pregnant individuals**

Update to York Region health care professionals as of December 20, 2023

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

York Region, similar to the rest of Ontario, is continuing to see an increase in iGAS cases in the current season compared to the previous season (2022-23) and the five pre-pandemic seasons. The highest rates of iGAS are in adults over 65 years of age and children aged one to nine years.

While iGAS is relatively uncommon, it can progress quickly and be associated with severe disease (such as sepsis, necrotizing fasciitis, pneumonia or other life-threatening conditions), which can result in death.

### **Recommended actions for clinicians**

Provide prompt assessment and treatment for patients with symptoms of non-invasive GAS (e.g., pharyngitis with consistent findings, skin and soft tissue infections). Note that GAS infections are generally considered non-infectious after 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic therapy.

Be alert to the 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
- Adults over 65 years of age
- Immunocompromised individuals
- People experiencing homelessness and/or using injection drugs
- Individuals with recent viral infections (e.g., influenza, chickenpox)

If iGAS is suspected, obtain appropriate specimens for routine bacterial culture or DNA detection by nucleic acid amplification testing (NAAT).

Please educate patients and parents/guardians on the signs and symptoms of serious bacterial infections and when to seek urgent medical attention.

Please also continue to support your patients to stay up-to-date on routine immunizations, particularly varicella and influenza immunizations, as we know there is an increased risk of iGAS following recent chickenpox or influenza infections.

iGAS is a disease of public health significance in Ontario. Please continue to [report](#) any cases of iGAS to York Region Public Health **immediately**.

## **Increased Mpox Activity**

The US Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and Public Health Agency of Canada have issued alerts to inform healthcare professionals about increased Mpox activity, including the first documented occurrence of sexual transmission of Clade 1 Mpox virus, which is more severe than Clade II. Clade IIb Mpox virus was associated with the

2022-23 global outbreak that has predominantly affected gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

While York Region has not had a confirmed case of Mpox since 2022, there have been sporadic cases throughout the GTA in 2023. In December 2023, [Hamilton Public Health](#) reported detecting the Mpox virus in their wastewater, which may indicate undiagnosed cases and the potential for ongoing community transmission.

Please continue to keep Mpox on your differential diagnosis when evaluating patients with clinically compatible [signs and symptoms](#) and consider assessing travel history when relevant. Also, please continue promoting first and second **Imvamune** doses to eligible at-risk groups, including Mpox vaccination, available at [York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics](#).

## **Encourage pregnant individuals to get their annual influenza immunization**

We anticipate that influenza season will be declared in York Region in the next week or two (the start of influenza season is declared when percent positivity reaches 5% for two consecutive weeks).

Influenza vaccination is an extremely important layer of protection against flu, especially for [high-risk groups](#) and has been shown to reduce influenza-related complications, hospitalizations, and deaths.

According to [NACI's updated guidance on influenza vaccination during pregnancy](#), despite being at high risk of severe illness, uptake of the influenza vaccine is **lower** among pregnant individuals than among people who are not at high risk. Influenza vaccination during pregnancy is safe and is the best way to prevent infection in pregnant individuals. Passive transfer of antibodies from vaccination during pregnancy also protects newborns during their first six months of life when they are at high risk for complications from influenza (and are too young to be immunized).

Please encourage your pregnant patients to obtain an annual influenza vaccine as [research](#) has shown that most pregnant individuals will accept vaccinations during pregnancy if their physician recommends it.

## **Contact Us**

For more information, call our dedicated health care professional line at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77280 (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday) or visit [york.ca/healthprofessionals](#).