



MELIOIDOSIS

Melioidosis is a very serious disease. People with diabetes are more prone to infection with Melioidosis. **During the 'wet season' the threat of contracting Melioidosis greatly increases.**

What is Melioidosis?

It is a disease caused by bacteria called *Burkholderia pseudomallei*. These bacteria live deeply in the soil during the dry season and come to the top during the wet season to be found in surface water and mud and may become airborne. Melioidosis often causes pneumonia but can also affect other parts of the body.

Melioidosis infections are more common in the Northern Territory and similarly in other tropical climates such as Northern Queensland, the Kimberley Region of Western Australia and South East Asia.

How can you get Melioidosis?

The disease is contracted from this bacteria entering the body via cuts, abrasions and sores on the skin or through inhalation when soil gets stirred up by the wind.

Who is most at risk of getting Melioidosis?

Those with pre-existing conditions that impair the body's immune system:

- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Chronic lung disease
- Cancer and/or immunosuppressive treatments
- People who consume large amounts of alcohol including those that binge drink

In 2018/19 there were 42 cases in the Northern Territory, most between the ages of 35 and 65 years. Over the past few years 10 percent of infections were fatal.

What are the symptoms of Melioidosis?

Symptoms include fevers, coughing, shortness of breath, tiredness, abdominal pain, urinary symptoms, skin ulcers and sometimes confusion and headaches. Sores that do not heal well should also be checked for Melioidosis.

Can Melioidosis be prevented?

The best precautions to protect yourself include:

- Wearing waterproof and covered foot wear, especially when outdoors
- Wearing protective gloves in the garden or when working with soil
- Covering sores so not exposed to the bacteria, using waterproof dressings
- Using face masks when using high pressured water hoses around soil
- Keeping indoors during rain and heavy wind
- Seeking medical help as soon as possible

How is Melioidosis treated?

People who contract Melioidosis often require hospital admission and antibiotics for 3 months. Most people will recover completely when treatment is started early. If you think you may have symptoms discuss with your GP, especially if you are in an area where Melioidosis is not well known.

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