



## Winter Update: Varicella (chickenpox) cases in Grey-Bruce

- Five confirmed cases of varicella (chickenpox) were reported locally in November and December of 2025—compared to one case during the same period in 2024.
- Varicella is the primary infection caused by varicella-zoster virus (VZV). Reactivation of the virus causes herpes zoster (shingles). Transmission occurs through the air and through direct contact with skin lesions of an infected person.
- Post-exposure management is recommended for susceptible individuals exposed to VZV. Susceptible pregnant or immunocompromised individuals are at risk of severe outcomes. Timely detection and reporting of cases of varicella to public health is required to facilitate contact tracing and notification.
- **Provider Precautions:** Airborne precautions are recommended when caring for clients suspected of having varicella. Those who have shared indoor airspace with a case for more than one hour (or have had close, face-to-face contact in a healthcare setting) without appropriate PPE are considered to have had a significant exposure.
- **Post-Exposure Management:**
  - Susceptible contacts are those without immunity through vaccination (two doses of varicella-containing vaccine) or past infection.
  - Healthy, non-pregnant susceptible contacts over 1 year of age who do not have a contraindication to vaccination should be offered a dose of univalent varicella vaccine within 3-5 days of exposure to prevent or reduce the severity of infection. For those whose immune status is unknown, immunization with a varicella-containing vaccine is generally preferred over completing serology.
  - Vaccination with a varicella-containing vaccine is contraindicated for those who are pregnant or immunocompromised, as well as infants. Susceptible contacts in these groups may be eligible for [Varicella zoster immune globulin \(Varlg\)](#). Optimally, Varlg should be administered within 96 hours of the first exposure but may be considered for up to 10 days to help attenuate disease. Serology is recommended before offering Varlg if results will be available within 96 hours of exposure. Varlg is not carried by public health and would be accessed through hospital blood bank services. Contact Grey Bruce Public Health at 519-376-9420 ext. 6 for additional support.
- **Prevention Measures:**
  - The recommended routine childhood schedule includes two doses of a varicella-containing vaccine. In Ontario, these are routinely administered to individuals born in or after 2000 at 15 months and 4 years of age (the 4-year dose is routinely given as an MMRV). For older individuals who have not completed the recommended childhood series or had a documented case of chicken pox after 1 year of age, two doses of any varicella-containing vaccine are recommended and continue to be publicly funded for eligible individuals – see the [Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules](#) for Ontario for more details.
  - [Shingles vaccine \(2 dose series\) is recommended](#) for all adults 50 years of age or older without contraindications, and/or for immunocompromised adults 18 years of age or older. In Ontario, it is publicly funded for individuals 65-70 years of age.

## Outbreak Watch: Increase in Hepatitis A cases in Northern Manitoba

- An increase of Hepatitis A (HAV) cases has been reported in northern Manitoba. Cases are affecting First Nations communities in the Island Lake area, and one related case has been identified in Northern Ontario.
- People travelling to Island Lake communities in Manitoba should receive a dose of publicly funded HAV vaccine prior to travel.
- HAV is an acute, self-limiting viral infection of the liver. While most cases resolve without intervention, older adults and individuals with comorbidities may experience more severe outcomes.
- The virus is primarily spread via the fecal-oral route through contaminated food or water, inadequate hand hygiene, and, less commonly, through sexual contact or needle sharing.
- **Clinical Presentation:**
  - Individuals may be asymptomatic, or present with mild symptoms without jaundice (the latter presentation is usually found in children less than 6 years of age).
  - When an individual is symptomatic, symptoms may include:
    - Abrupt onset of fever, malaise, loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain
    - Jaundice
    - Dark urine
    - Pale stools
    - Pruritus
- **Clinical Guidance:** Consider HAV as a differential diagnosis for any patient presenting with compatible symptoms, relevant geographic exposure and risk factors.
- **Testing:** Testing for HAV infection is serological. Please visit the Public Health Ontario (PHO) Laboratory Services [Hep A serology](#) page for more information.

## Invitation: Participate in Public Health Agency of Canada's Vaccine Access Study

- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is seeking healthcare professionals who provide immunizations to pregnant individuals, Black Canadians, and newcomers to Canada to participate in a qualitative study. The results will inform policy and program development to improve vaccine access for these groups. For more information, visit [Invitation: Participate in Public Health Agency of Canada's Vaccine Access Study](#).

## Resources for Primary Care Professionals

- [AMMI Canada Seasonal Influenza Update 2025-2026: Some Questions Answered](#) – The Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease (AMMI) Canada has provided a synopsis of key information about the 2025-2026 influenza season for health care providers, including responses to the following questions:
  1. What stands out for the 2025-26 influenza season and why is the vaccine still recommended?
  2. Which antiviral medications are available and what is advised for children and adults?
  3. Are any changes recommended in the way antiviral medications are used for the current season?
- [Influenza FAQs by GBPH](#) – Grey Bruce Public Health has developed a two-page Frequently Asked Questions document on Influenza and the current Influenza situation in Ontario.

## For Patients

- [Alzheimer's Society Grey-Bruce: Memory and Aging Program](#) – Facilitated, in-person course designed for older adults to improve memory strategies and prevent cognitive decline, taking place Jan. 6, 13, 20, and 27
- [The Driver's Seat: A Driving Wellness Resource for Older Adults, Caregivers and Practitioners in Grey-Bruce](#) – Developed by Grey-Bruce Design and Implementation working group—and intended for older adults and caregivers—this resource offers checklists, tips, exercises and legal information tailored to support adults and caregivers navigate sensitive conversations around driving and safety.

## Webinars

- [PHO Webinar: Substance Use and Gender-Based Violence: Strategies and Resources](#) – Jan. 14, 2026.

## Media Releases

- [As flu activity rises, GBPH is reminding residents to protect themselves against respiratory viruses](#) – Dec. 16, 2025.