

Media Release



Department of Health

Monsoon rains increase the risk of Melioidosis

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Recent monsoonal rains in the Top End have increased the threat of the potentially deadly disease, Melioidosis.

There are between 40 and 90 cases of the soil-borne disease reported in the Northern Territory each year with the majority diagnosed across the Wet Season between October and May.

Dr Vicki Krause, Director of Disease Control and Environmental Health, Top End Health Service said recent heavy rains and the monsoonal weather expected in the coming weeks increased the risk of the disease.

“In past years around 10 per cent of infections have been fatal, even with the best medical care. Last season there were 45 cases of Melioidosis and one death in the NT,” she said.

“Cuts and sores are the perfect entry point for the bacteria to invade the body, but they can also be inhaled when soil gets stirred up by wind.

“Melioidosis most often presents as pneumonia but can affect various parts of the body and can cause difficulty in passing urine for men. Skin sores that do not heal should also be investigated for Melioidosis.”

While people of all ages can get Melioidosis, last year the majority of cases were in people aged over 50 years. All cases were from across the Top End, with Darwin city and rural Darwin presenting with the most cases.

Melioidosis is a disease caused by the bacterium, *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, which is found in tropical soil. People come in contact with these bacteria during the Wet Season when the presence of the bacteria in surface soil and water greatly increases following the onset of the rains. It can enter the body when areas of broken skin are exposed to contaminated mud or surface water.

During the wet season, people should take the following precautions:

- wear covered waterproof footwear when outdoors
- wear gloves while working in the garden/soil-based environment
- cover sores and abrasions with waterproof dressings
- wear face masks while using high pressure hoses around soil
- stay indoors during heavy wind and rain
- seek medical attention early if concerned

Melioidosis can cause a variety of symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, abdominal pain, non-healing sores, urinary symptoms and occasionally headache and confusion.

Anyone concerned about Melioidosis should visit their local GP or healthcare provider.

Further information on Melioidosis can be obtained on 8922 8044 or [online](#).

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