

General Information

Prevention and Control of Communicable Disease

Reviewed: May, 2010

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There are numerous methods and interventions available to prevent and control communicable diseases. Health promotion activities have been shown to ease the burden on the health care system. Three types of preventive approaches can be applied to communicable diseases: primary, secondary, and tertiary. These approaches can be exercised across the lifespan of individuals and across all sectors of the health care system. Saskatchewan's health care system has resources available to promote health and well-being, and also to treat individuals infected with infectious agents.

Primary prevention is any effort undertaken to prevent the occurrence of diseases. This is one of the most important steps in disease prevention and control and even though all health care services play a role, this is most often the domain of public/community health services. Publicly funded childhood immunization programs are examples of primary prevention. Primary prevention also includes promoting healthy lifestyles and education specific to preventing the transmission of communicable diseases in recreational and personal service settings (body art establishments, esthetic salons, etc.).

Unfortunately, it may not be possible to prevent all communicable diseases and illnesses. However, by implementing the secondary prevention methods it is possible to detect diseases in a timely fashion and possibly slow the progression of disease within the individuals or disease transmission in the population. Understanding risk factors in the population and implementing methods of screening allows us to detect disease in early stages. For instance, screening for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and blood borne pathogens allows health care providers to offer interventions that prevent secondary complications. Routine pap smears can allow for early detection and treatment of cellular abnormalities from a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection that left untreated may lead to cervical cancer.

Tertiary prevention approaches include the efforts of health care providers to minimize the effects of an agent and prevents disability as a result of infection. Tertiary prevention is often the responsibility of health care providers working outside of public health. The intensive supportive treatment of individuals with severe West Nile Neurological Syndrome (WNNS) and their rehabilitation is an example of tertiary prevention provided through the acute care or rehabilitative care system. The provision of antiviral treatment to people infected with hepatitis C virus or people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is another example of tertiary prevention.



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In contrast, screening people living with HIV or AIDS for coinfection with tuberculosis is an example of secondary prevention (of tuberculosis) and the provision of hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccine to people infected with hepatitis C is an example of primary prevention (of hepatitis A and hepatitis B).

