



Winnipeg Regional Health Authority    Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg  
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## **TAINTED COCAINE LINKED TO POTENTIALLY FATAL ILLNESS IN WINNIPEG**

### ***Winnipeg Health Region issuing warning after two hospitalized with illness***

**Winnipeg** – Two adults were recently hospitalized suffering from ‘neutropenia’ (also known as agranulocytosis), a serious illness that impacts patients’ immune systems, leaving them unable to fight off infections. In severe cases, if left untreated, the disease can be fatal. It is believed both patients, known cocaine users, became ill as a result of using cocaine adulterated with levamisole.

Dr. Pierre Plourde, WRHA Medical Officer of Health urged current users of cocaine and crack cocaine, if possible, to stop or reduce use of the drug. Those who continue to use are urged to be vigilant for any signs of fever or infection. The range of potential infections caused by neutropenia includes wounds and sores (ulcers), bladder (urinary tract) or lung (pneumonia).

Levamisole is a drug used by veterinarians to rid animals of internal parasites, but is not used in humans. No one knows why it has been added to cocaine.

“Even a dealer you trust may have tainted drugs and not know it,” Dr. Plourde said. “If you do continue to use, then please keep an eye out for fever and unusual infections in yourself or other users and immediately seek medical help. Without medical treatment, the condition can lead to death.” Anyone who suspects they know someone who may be suffering from neutropenia or who wants more information can call Health Links – Info Santé at 788-8200.

Dr. Plourde said there were many cases of severe neutropenia (or agranulocytosis) in Alberta and British Columbia in 2008 and 2009 that were related to levamisole adulterated cocaine.

Both Winnipeg cases (one confirmed; one suspect) were admitted to hospital over the last two weeks. One has since been discharged home.

**Dr. Pierre Plourde is available for comment today at 3:00 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the WRHA Main Office, 650 Main Street.**

**For more information please contact:**

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