

Woman warns of stomach bacteria

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SOMBA K'E/YELLOWKNIFE - Juliette Rivet has a message for people in the Mackenzie Valley: get tested for *Helicobacter pylori*.

"Tell my people in Fort Good Hope, Deline and Tulita to please get tested," said Rivet, who recently tested positive for the infection after a lifetime of chronic stomach ailments.

The 67-year-old Vernon, B.C. resident was born in Fort Good Hope and spent her childhood in Tulita and Aklavik. She left the North in 1957 but kept in contact with her family in the Mackenzie Valley.

It wasn't until she read an article about the recent *H. pylori* testing in Aklavik that she decided to be tested for the bacterium.

A breath test showed she had *H. pylori* and her doctor has started her on a penicillin regimen.

"They gave me a medication but I'm a bleeder pretty bad so I just can't handle that," said Rivet.

The medication she has been prescribed ironically causes stomach bleeding as a side effect. She has been taking smaller doses and she's hoping a better treatment will be developed soon.

"They said they're growing better cultures in Edmonton to see which treatment is best," said Rivet.

In the meantime Rivet, who is a traditional healer, has been making her own herbal tea. She said the Creator gives her guidance about what to put in her teas.

H. pylori is a stomach bacteria that can lead to stomach ulcers and stomach cancer. It is spread through bodily fluids. Much is still unknown about the bacteria, which was only identified in the 1980s.

A screening done in Aklavik in February of this year showed that over half of Aklavik has the bacteria. Not all of those people are suffering stomach problems. The bacteria can reside in a person's stomach for years without causing any problems.

Rivet worries that other students who attended the residential school in Aklavik were also exposed to *H. pylori* and may have carried the bacteria to their home communities. That is why she is urging others to get tested, especially if they suffer from stomach problems.

Rivet said she has survived much in her lifetime including exposure to uranium mine tailings as a child in Tulita and a hit-and-run accident two years ago. She said the Creator has kept her around for a reason.

Dr. Karen Goodman, associate professor at the University of Alberta, studies infections linked to chronic disease. She said anyone who is concerned about *H. pylori* should be tested, but also cautions that people without symptoms need not worry.

"The clinical practice guidelines do not endorse testing for H. pylori infection in people with no symptoms," said Goodman.

She said there is no link between residential school attendance and exposure to the bacteria. However, Northerners are statistically more likely to carry the bacterium.

"If people are worried about it they certainly could request to be tested although there is no evidence that people without symptoms would benefit [from testing]," she said.

Goodman also cautioned that chronic stomach ailments are not always caused by H. pylori infection.

Rivet said the infection has affected her way of life but she continues to live life to the fullest. She has been working with residential school survivors to help with spiritual healing.

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