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Deadly soil-borne disease warning issued

GOVEITES are being reminded that December's heavy rains have created ideal conditions for the bacteria which causes the potentially deadly soil-borne disease, melioidosis.

Melioidosis is a serious disease caused by germs in the soil that surface after heavy rains.

These germs enter the body through cuts and sores or can be breathed in during rain and windy conditions.

There have been six cases of melioidosis diagnosed in the Top End this wet season ahead, with four people requiring intensive care management.

One person has died.

Melioidosis has claimed 118 lives in the Top End over the last 26 years.

Director of the Centre for Disease Control, Dr Vicki Krause, said the risk of melioidosis was greatest for people with diabetes or kidney disease, those who drink too much alcohol or those with a weakened immune system.

"Most cases have conditions making them more susceptible so people need to be aware of these conditions and modify their activities where possible," she said.

The most common symptoms for melioidosis were a fever, a cough and breathing difficulties but presentations can vary greatly.

"The time from exposure and infection to acute disease is from one to 21 days," Dr Krause said.

In some cases the onset of symptoms is slower and will include features like weight loss or sores

that do not heal. A sore that does not heal in two weeks should be assessed by a doctor.

"It is important people new to the Territory are aware of this disease, melioidosis, and take precautions where possible and seek medical attention should symptoms develop," Dr Krause said.

Anyone concerned they might have melioidosis should contact the Gove District Hospital or their GP.