

# Meningococcal Disease

I N F O R M A T I O N

## What is meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is an infection caused by a bacterial germ known as meningococcus.
- Up to 20% of healthy people carry the bacteria in their throat or nose without the bacteria causing illness.
- There are 13 different serogroups (types) of meningococcal bacteria. In NSW, over half the cases are caused by serogroup B and just under half by serogroup C.

## How common is it?

- The disease is rare and affects less than one in ten thousand people in NSW each year.
- It can occur at any age, but is mostly seen in children and young adults.

## How is it spread?

- The disease is *NOT* easily spread. It is passed on by close person-to-person contact through saliva, eg. mouth kissing or sharing drink bottles, toothbrushes or cigarettes.

## What are the symptoms and how are they treated?

- Meningococcal infections can lead to meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain), septicaemia (blood poisoning) and other illnesses.
- Symptoms may include sudden onset of fever, headache, tiredness, neck stiffness, vomiting or nausea, sore eyes sensitive to light, joint pain and a rash.
- Symptoms are often less specific in young children and may include fever, drowsiness, vomiting, being unsettled and a rash. The rash is quite distinctive and may look like bleeding into the skin or purple-red spots. However, a rash does not always appear.

- **IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION EARLY.** Most people recover completely from meningococcal disease with early treatment with antibiotics. In a few individuals, however, the disease can be serious and life-threatening.

## What about contacts?

- Contacts are people who have been identified as having **VERY** close contact with a person who has the disease, such as family and household members, or those who have been exposed to the person's saliva.
- Contacts are offered a special antibiotic to kill the bacteria in the nose or throat, and therefore reduce the risk of further cases. This antibiotic does **NOT** treat the disease but simply stops the likelihood of the bacteria being carried in the nose and throat. Different antibiotics are used if symptoms develop.

## Is there a vaccine?

- Vaccines are available against some types of meningococcal disease.
- A vaccine is **NOT** available against serogroup B meningococcal disease (the most common type in NSW).
- A meningococcal vaccine is given to travellers visiting countries where specific types of meningococci frequently cause disease (eg. parts of Africa), and to persons with specific health conditions (eg. a person with no spleen).
- Rarely vaccines are used during outbreaks of meningococcal disease in confined environments (such as boarding schools, residential colleges or military barracks).
- These vaccines are not part of the routinely recommended immunisation schedule, but are commercially available.
- People considering vaccination should seek advice from their General Practitioner.

**Further information**

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – see under NSW Government at the front of the *White Pages*.

**Public Health Units in NSW****Metropolitan**

Central Sydney	9515 3180
South Eastern Sydney	9382 8333
Northern Sydney	9477 9400
South Western Sydney	9828 5944
Western Sydney	9840 3603
Wentworth	4734 2022

**Rural**

Central Coast	4349 4845
Mid North Coast	6588 2750
Mid Western	6339 5500
Hunter	4924 6477
Illawarra	4275 4600
New England	6766 2288
Northern Rivers	6620 7500
Macquarie	6841 2216
Southern NSW	4827 3428
Greater Murray	6021 4799
Far West	(08) 8080 1219

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