



12 April 2018

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

Meningitis is an infection of the protective membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord (meninges).

It can affect anyone, but is most common in babies, young children, teenagers and young adults.

Meningitis can be very serious if not treated quickly. It can cause life-threatening blood poisoning (septicaemia) and result in permanent damage to the brain or nerves.

A number of vaccinations are available that offer some protection against meningitis

Some signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| High temperature | Rapid breathing |
| Vomiting/ diarrhoea and stomach cramps | Joint or muscle pain |
| | Cold hands and feet |
| Severe headache | Abnormal skin colour |
| Stiff neck | Rash/ Bruising rash |
| Dislike of bright light | Drowsiness or confusion |

Not everyone will develop these symptoms and they can appear in any order. Meningococcal disease can be hard to identify at first because it can be like a bad case of flu. However, anyone affected will usually become seriously ill within a few hours and you should contact your GP (family doctor) or call the hospital on 725241 urgently to seek advice if you have any concerns. BE WATCHFUL and use your instincts. Early treatment can be life-saving.

How the disease spreads

Meningococcal disease is not very infectious and it very rarely spreads from child to child within a school. The bacteria that cause the illness live naturally in the back of the throat and can spread between people in droplets from the mouth

and nose. Many people carry the bacteria in their throats without becoming unwell.

Preventing the spread of meningococcal disease

The most effective way to stop the disease spreading is by giving antibiotics to the very close family contacts of the patient with the illness. That usually means that only people who live in the same house as the sick child need treatment. School contacts are only very rarely at a higher risk and therefore do not normally need antibiotics or investigation.

Protecting against meningococcal disease

It is important to be aware that meningococcal disease is caused by different groups of meningococcal bacteria. In the UK disease is almost always caused by one of four meningococcal groups commonly known as MenB, MenC, MenW or MenY. Some groups of meningococcal disease can be prevented with vaccines. The following meningococcal vaccines are offered as part of the routine schedule in Guernsey:

- Men B vaccine (which protects against most meningococcal group B disease), routinely offered as three doses given as part of the infant immunisation programme
- Men C vaccine (which protects against meningococcal group C disease), routinely offered at 12-13 months as part of the routine childhood immunisation programme
- Men ACWY vaccine (which protects against meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y) routinely offered at around 13/14 years of age
- MenACWY vaccine is also available for new university entrants (<25 years) who have not previously received MenACWY vaccine

Please ensure your child is up to date with their routine vaccinations via your GP. Be watchful for signs and symptoms even if your child is up to date with their vaccinations as available vaccines do not protect against all forms of the disease.

If you need further support or advice, please contact Dr Nicola Brink (Director of Public Health) or Mrs Kay Bull, Lead Infection, Prevention and Control Nurse) through the PEH switchboard.

Useful websites

Meningitis Research Foundation www.meningitis.org

Meningitis Now www.meningitisnow.org

NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Meningitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Public Health England <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/meningococcal-disease-guidance-data-and-analysis>

Dr Nicola Brink
Director of Public Health