

# Neisseria meningitidis invasive disease (meningococcal disease) Information Sheet

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## *What is it?*

Meningococcal disease, pronounced ma-nen-ja-cocel, is a very serious disease that affects children and adults. It is an infection caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*, and can lead to two very serious illnesses:

- Meningitis (pronounced men-in-jy-tis - an infection of your brain lining)
- Septicaemia (pronounced, sep-ta-see-meea, which is blood poisoning)

Meningococcal disease can look like a case of influenza in its early stages.

## *What are the signs and symptoms?*

Meningococcal disease may develop slowly over one or two days or may develop quickly over a few hours.

Babies or children may:

- Have a high fever (feel hot)
- Be crying or unsettled
- Refuse drinks or feeds
- Vomit
- Be sleepy or floppy or harder to wake
- Have a stiff neck and dislike bright lights
- Have a rash or spots

Adults may:

- Have a fever and headache
- Vomit
- Be sleepy, confused, delirious or unconscious
- Have a stiff neck
- Dislike bright lights
- Have joint pain and aching muscles
- Have a rash or spots

## *How serious is it?*

Meningococcal disease is very serious and can lead to disability or death. If it is treated quickly with antibiotics this may help prevent serious harm.

Meningococcal disease cannot be treated at home, you must get medical help quickly. Don't wait – if someone is sick in your household with one or more of these symptoms, ring a doctor or 111 right away, day or night.

## *Who is most at risk?*

Meningococcal disease can affect anyone. Babies, children under 5-years-old, teenagers and young adults living in hostels or flatting are at greater risk. Exposure to tobacco smoke, living in a crowded household, having a weak immune system or a respiratory infection like the flu can increase your chances of catching the disease.

People can catch it at any time of the year, but it's more common in winter and spring.

## *How could I get infected?*

Meningococcal disease is spread in a similar way to the common cold. The bacteria live in the nose and throat and are spread by coughing, sneezing, kissing, and sharing food and drink with an infected person.

## *How do I protect myself and others?*

Cover your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough and wash and dry your hands thoroughly. Avoid sharing eating or drinking utensils (such as spoons, forks and cups), toothbrushes or pacifiers.

It is recommended that adults and children, who have been in close contact with someone who has meningococcal disease, have antibiotic treatment, starting within 24 hours of contact with an infected

person. This usually includes people in the same household as someone with meningococcal disease.

The public health service (which is part of the Hawke's Bay District Health Board) will be notified of any cases of meningococcal disease and will identify all the other people that need to be offered antibiotics. The antibiotics kill the bacteria stop the spread of the disease.

Other types of meningococcal vaccines are available for people with specific risks. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse. The vaccines do not protect against all types of meningococcal disease. You will need to watch out for signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease whether you or your child have been vaccinated or not.

### *Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?*

If you have meningococcal disease you may need to be off work/school or preschool for several weeks or even months while you recover. Even after you no longer have the infection, you may have some long-term issues such as brain damage, deafness, depression or memory loss.

### *How is it treated?*

Treatment in hospital is required for every person with meningococcal disease, and you may need to stay in hospital for several weeks. Hospital treatments may include:

- antibiotics going straight into a vein
- fluid going into a vein to stop dehydration
- oxygen through a face mask if you have breathing difficulties
- steroid medication to help reduce any swelling around your brain

Even after going home, it may be a while before you feel completely back to normal.

### *Where can I get further information?*

For further information on meningococcal disease please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.