



To:	General Practices, Pharmacists, After-Hours Centres and Emergency Departments in the greater Wellington and Wairarapa regions
From:	Dr Annette Nesdale, Medical Officer of Health
Date:	26 August 2015
Title:	Public Health Alert: Meningococcal Disease

Please distribute the following information to relevant staff in your organisation.

If you would like to receive this by email please advise RPH of your email on rph@huttvalleydhub.org.nz.
All public health alerts are available at www.rph.org.nz (health professionals – public health alerts)

Meningococcal disease

Regional Public Health has been notified of 3 people with meningococcal disease in the greater Wellington region since the beginning of August. The occurrence of these cases is sporadic and the ill people are not known to each other and have not attended any common events. This increase in illness in late winter and early spring is consistent with previous years when there has been a lot of respiratory illness circulating in the community.

Public health follows up at Kindercare Kilbirnie on Wednesday 26th August

A child notified with confirmed meningococcal disease attends Kindercare in Kilbirnie. The public health team have been at the centre, reviewed the layout and met with staff and parents this afternoon. The ill child attends the older (2-5 year olds) programme and is in pre-school room 3. This is quite separate from the baby and under 2 year old area. Although the risk of secondary cases in an early childcare centre is low, the children and staff who are in pre-school room 3 have been given antibiotics. These children and staff have spent 30-40+ hours in the last week together, which is similar to household contact.

Other children who attend the centre, do not have prolonged contact and do **not** need antibiotics. Meningococcal disease is **not** spread by brief contact at drop-off or pick-up time or in the playground. All the staff and parents at the centre have been given information about meningococcal disease (see the attached letter).

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He ture no nga korero katoa kei roto o tenei karere, no reira, kia tupato. Mehemea kaore matau kua e mau. Me whakamohiotia atu ki to Tari, me te mea nana I tonu mai. E Tika Hoki.

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

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Regional Public Health
Better Health For The Greater Wellington Region



If you are contacted by a parent concerned about their child's potential exposure we would be grateful if you could re-iterate the advice we have provided above.

We are also very happy to telephone parents and provide additional information, this is best done by the parent telephoning Regional Public Health during work hours on 04 570 9002 and asking to speak to a public health nurse in the communicable disease team.

If there is an urgent issue that you would like to discuss outside of office hours you can telephone the on-call Medical Officer of Health on 04 570 9002.

A copy of the information sheet on meningococcal disease provided to all schools and early childhood education centres in the greater Wellington region, is available below.



26 August 2015

To: Parents, caregivers and staff of Kindercare, Kilbirnie

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

A child who attends Kindercare, Kilbirnie has been diagnosed with confirmed meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria that live in the back of the nose or throat and usually this does not cause disease.

Close contacts of the child in Pre-school room 3 are being given antibiotics by public health staff. The main purpose of the antibiotics is to treat people who may be carrying the bacteria in the back of the nose and throat, and stop the spread of the disease. Antibiotics to eliminate carriage of the bacteria will not stop the development of the disease if someone is already developing the illness.

Other people do not need antibiotics unless there has been very close contact. The bacteria are usually only passed from person to person in very close contact, usually in the same household, such as by kissing. It is the contact with saliva which is important. Meningococcal disease is not spread by brief contact at drop off or pick up time or in the playground. The bacteria do not live long outside the human body. While secondary cases (i.e. a second case in a family or other close group) occasionally occur, the bacteria are not passed readily from person to person like the flu or common cold.

Meningococcal disease can be either meningitis (infection in the linings of the brain and spinal cord) or septicaemia (infection in the blood). The disease may start with a 'flu like illness, and then rapidly progress to a more serious illness with fever, headache, drowsiness, vomiting, stiff neck, a skin rash like blood spots under the skin, and sensitivity to bright lights.

In babies or children the illness may be more difficult to identify. Other symptoms in babies or children may include a fever, high pitched crying, generally being unsettled, refusing drinks or feeds, vomiting, being sleepy or floppy or hard to wake or a skin rash.

It can be very hard to tell meningococcal disease from the flu in the early stages. If you become unwell with a combination of these symptoms you should consult your doctor or after hours medical centre urgently. Tell your doctor about your contact with meningococcal disease. I suggest you take this letter with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara Eddie'.

Barbara Eddie
Public Health Nurse
For Medical Officer of Health



Further public health advice:

Service	Contact details 📞	Comment
Regional Public Health	Office hours (8am to 5pm) 04-570-9002 After hours 04 570-9007	Most enquiries about the public health follow up are best answered by the Public Health nurse team in office hours Urgent enquiries about the public health follow up. Ask to speak to the on-call person for meningococcal disease at Regional Public Health
Healthline	0800 611 116 for free 24-hour health advice	Healthline is a free telephone health information service for all the family. The service is staffed by registered nurses who will assess your health needs, and give information and advice.
Ministry of Health	www.moh.govt.nz	Further information available on this useful website

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial illness that presents in 2 main ways:

- **Meningitis:** (infection of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord)
- **Septicaemia:** (infection of the bloodstream). It can affect anyone – but it's more common in babies, children under the age of 5 years – especially Maori and Pacific children, teenagers, and young adults.

People with signs and symptoms suspicious of meningococcal infection need to seek immediate medical advice from their doctor or a hospital. A delay of even hours can be fatal. Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics but **early treatment is very important.**

If you or someone in your household is sick with one or more of the symptoms outlined below, take action immediately.

- Ring a doctor, medical centre, after hours clinic or Healthline (0800 611 116) right away – whether it is day or night.
- Say what the symptoms are.
- If you think it might be meningococcal disease, **don't be put off. Insist on immediate action.**
- Even if a person has been checked by a doctor, they should still be watched.
- If they get worse go straight back to a doctor or the hospital. Do not leave them alone.
- If it's an emergency call 111 and ask for an ambulance.

It is important that you are aware of the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, and seek medical advice quickly if you're concerned.

Signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease can look like influenza (the flu) in its early stages, but it quickly gets much worse. The symptoms and signs may not all show up at once, and the illness may develop gradually over one or two days, or much more quickly over a few hours. People with meningococcal disease may have some or all of the following:

Babies and children

- Fever
- Crying, unsettled, irritable
- Refusing drinks or feeds or vomiting
- Sleepy, floppy, harder to wake
- Stiff neck or dislike of bright lights
- Reluctant to walk
- Rash - purple or red spots or bruises

Adults

- Fever
- Headache, stiff neck
- Vomiting
- Sleepy, confused, delirious, unconscious
- Joint pains, aching muscles
- Rash - purple or red spots or bruises



Immunisation

There are several different strains of meningococcal bacteria, but there is not a vaccine that protects against all of them. People with specific medical conditions are vaccinated against groups A, C, Y and W135 and it is recommended (but not funded) that young people living in hostel accommodation are vaccinated against group C disease. The main use of meningococcal vaccines is to control outbreaks and epidemics.

None of the vaccines provide long-term protection. Even if you or your child have been immunised with the MeNZB™ vaccine or one of the other meningococcal vaccines, you or your child can still get meningococcal disease from other strains of bacteria, so you need to know about the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you would like more information about what vaccines are available and the cost of being immunised.

For further information

- www.health.govt.nz/yourhealth-topics/diseases-and-illnesses/meningococcal-disease
- www.immune.org.nz/diseases/meningococcal-disease
- Information about meningococcal disease is available in Maori, Samoan and Tongan at <https://www.healthed.govt.nz/resource/meningococcal-disease-know-symptoms>

To order resources:

- <https://www.healthed.govt.nz>

