

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT Meningococcal disease (Meningitis)

What is Meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection that causes two very serious illnesses: meningitis (an infection of the membranes that cover the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning).

Who can be affected?

It can affect anyone – but it's more common in children under the age of 5, teenagers, and young adults. Students in their first year of tertiary education living in student accommodation may also be at higher risk.

Is there a higher risk of getting the disease following the recent case in Taranaki?

There is a higher risk for people who are family or close contacts of the case for several weeks. However there is no extra risk for the general public following a case of meningococcal disease. People should always be aware of the signs and symptoms of the disease as it is not uncommon to have one or two cases of meningococcal disease a year in Taranaki.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease can be difficult to diagnose in its early stages because it can look like other illnesses, such as the flu.

Symptoms of meningitis can develop suddenly and include:

- a high fever
- headache
- sleepiness
- joint and muscle pains.

There can also be some more specific symptoms, such as:

- a stiff neck
- dislike of bright lights
- vomiting
- crying
- refusal to feed (in infants)
- a rash consisting of reddish-purple pin-prick spots or bruises.

Get help immediately if you see one or more of these symptoms.

Meningococcal Disease causes Meningitis

Don't wait – take action
Even if you think the person has been immunised.

- Meningococcal disease is fast and can kill or cause serious disability.
- Get help **immediately** if you see one or more of the symptoms below.
- These meningococcal disease symptoms may not all show at once.

Symptoms in babies	Symptoms in older children and adults		
 High fever (may also have cool hands and feet or shivering)	 Sleepy or floppy or harder to wake	 High fever and headache	 Confusion and sleepiness
 Unusual crying	 Stiff neck	 Joint pain and aching muscles	 Stiff neck
 Dislike bright lights	 Vomiting	 Dislike bright lights	 Vomiting
 Refusal to feed	 Sometimes, red or purple spots or bruises on the skin	 Sometimes, red or purple spots or bruises on the skin	

Not everyone with meningococcal disease gets spots. Don't wait for spots to appear before getting medical help.

 You can call Healthline free 24 hours a day: **0800 611 116**

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Can the disease spread?

Meningococcal bacteria are difficult to catch as they don't live for very long outside of the body. They pass from one person to another through secretions from the nose or throat, during close or prolonged contact, for example:

- by coughing or sneezing (by droplet spread)
- by intimate kissing

How can it be treated?

It's important to be aware of the symptoms so you can get medical help straight away – whether it's day or night. Meningococcal disease needs to be treated in hospital with high dose intravenous antibiotics.

How can it be avoided?

The main way for people to protect themselves and their whanau is to be aware of the symptoms. Meningococcal disease starts like the flu but very quickly can get worse. Basic steps like covering your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough, and washing and drying your hands can help reduce the chance of spreading the bacteria that can cause illness.

Can you be immunised against meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal vaccines are not part of the routine immunisations given to children in New Zealand. However in certain circumstances meningococcal vaccines are recommended and provided free of charge, including people who have had a splenectomy, those with immunosuppression, bone marrow transplant patients, and those who are close contacts of a meningococcal disease case. Meningococcal vaccine is also recommended for adolescents and young adults living in communal accommodation, but this is not funded by the government.

For further advice on immunisation please talk to your GP or practise nurse.

Where to go for help?

If an individual is sick, check them often. Don't delay to seek medical attention by either:

- Ringing the 24/7 Healthline – 0800 611 611
- Visiting your GP
- Visiting the hospital's Emergency Departments (ED)

If a person gets worse, go straight back to the doctor or hospital.

More information can also be found at www.moh.govt.nz/meningococcal

What else do I need to know?

Unfortunately the bug can cause a highly invasive illness for a small number of healthy people which is impossible to predict beforehand. This is why it is important to seek medical attention straight away. Taranaki DHB asks our community to be vigilant and look for signs and symptoms of the disease.