



24/03/2025

Important: Meningococcal disease information

Dear Parent or Guardian,

A student at your child's school has been admitted to hospital with suspected **meningococcal disease** which can cause both meningitis and septicaemia. Meningitis is when bacteria reach the meninges (the lining around the brain and spinal cord) and cause dangerous swelling. Septicaemia is when bacteria enter the bloodstream and cause blood poisoning.

Both forms of meningococcal disease can trigger sepsis – an overwhelming and life-threatening immune response to infection which can lead to organ failure.

This letter gives you some information about the disease.

How the disease spreads

The meningococcal bacteria very rarely spread 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. Most people carry the bacteria in their throats without becoming unwell.

Preventing the spread of meningococcal disease

The best way to stop the disease spreading is by giving antibiotics to the very close family contacts of the patient with the illness. This usually means that only people who live in the same house as the sick child need treatment. School contacts are only very rarely at risk.

Any children or staff who are considered by Public Health to be close contacts will be contacted directly and provided with antibiotics.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease

The risk of another case in the school is very small but it is sensible to be aware of the main signs and symptoms of meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia, outlined below.

Some common signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| High temperature | Rapid or unusual breathing |
| Vomiting or diarrhoea and stomach cramps | Joint or muscle pain |
| | Cold hands and feet |
| Severe headache | Pale blotchy skin |
| Stiff neck | Confusion and/or irritability |
| Dislike of bright light | Drowsiness or difficult to wake |
| Rash or bruising rash | Seizures or fits |



One or more of these symptoms may develop 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 with meningococcal disease will usually become seriously ill within a few hours. You should keep checking your child if they are unwell and contact your GP for advice if you have any concerns (and outside office hours and over weekends – phone ShannonDoc on 0818 123 500)

If you become worried about your child's condition, particularly if they are getting worse, seek medical help **urgently** at the closest Accident and Emergency department or by dialling 999.

Protecting against meningococcal disease - vaccination

It is important to be aware that meningococcal disease is caused by different groups of meningococcal bacteria. In Ireland, meningococcal vaccines are offered as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule – Men B vaccine (which protects against Men B disease) is given routinely as 3 doses at 2, 4 and 12 months and Men C vaccine which protects against Men C disease is given routinely at 6 and 13 months. Due to a change in the childhood vaccination schedule, babies born after 1st October 2024 will receive Men C vaccine at 13 months only. Men ACWY vaccine (which protects against Men A, C, W and Y) is routinely given to children in 1st year of secondary school.

Please ensure your child is up to date with their routine vaccinations via your GP practice. 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 causes of the disease.

Further information on meningococcal disease is available on the HSE website at:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/meningitis-septicaemia-children-babies/>

If you need further support or advice, please contact the Dept of Public Health HSE Mid-West on 061 463800.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Diane Bredin

Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine

MCRN: 068317