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Dear Parent/ Carer,

RECENT INCREASE IN CASES OF MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE IN TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS

Recent data and analysis from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that in autumn 2021 there was an increase in the number of cases of meningococcal disease in teenagers and young adults, mainly caused by group B meningococcal disease (MenB) – with the majority among university students in the UK.

Meningococcal disease is rare but is a life-threatening infection caused by bacteria that can go on to cause meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). There are 5 main meningococcal strains that cause disease in the UK. MenB is the most common strain in the UK and other strains include MenA, MenC, MenW and MenY.

Since 2015, babies have been offered the MenB vaccination so these children will have protection if fully vaccinated. Students and young people can help protect themselves against some types of meningococcal bacteria by ensuring that they've had their Men ACWY vaccine. All school children aged 14 years (year 9) living in the UK will be offered this vaccination in school. If you have not received or are unsure, then just contact your GP to check or arrange an appointment as soon as possible.

Students and parents need to be aware of the early signs and symptoms of meningitis or septicaemia. Symptoms can progress rapidly, so it is important to seek medical help immediately. The earlier you can get help, the quicker you can start treatment. Over the last 2 years COVID has dominated our lives, other infections, some more serious than others are still a risk to the community.

Common signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia:

- fever with cold hands and feet
- vomiting
- drowsy or difficult to wake
- confusion and irritability
- severe muscle pain
- pale blotchy skin, spots or rash
- severe headache
- stiff neck
- uncomfortable in bright light
- convulsions or seizures

If you have any of these symptoms, seek medical help immediately.

[Don't ignore the signs – Meningitis \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk) – Please see this link for access to the images on the next page

The main signs and symptoms

Meningitis:

- fever
- very bad headache
- vomiting
- stiff neck
- dislike of bright lights
- rash
- confusion, delirium
- severe sleepiness, losing consciousness
- seizures

Septicaemia:

- fever and shivering
- vomiting
- severe pains and aches in limbs and joints
- very cold hands and feet
- pale or mottled skin
- rapid breathing
- diarrhoea and stomach cramps
- red or purple 'bruised' or blotchy rash on skin* that do not fade under pressure – do the glass test shown overleaf
- difficulty walking or standing
- severe sleepiness, losing consciousness

Not everyone will develop all these symptoms – they can appear in any order and be mixed between the two diseases. It is important to seek early medical advice if you or a friend have symptoms of concern or a condition that is getting rapidly worse.
*On dark skin, check inside the eyelids or roof of the mouth where the spots may be more visible.

Make sure you and your friends look out for each other and that someone knows if you are unwell so they can keep an eye on you. This could be life-saving!

For more information contact:

Meningitis Research Foundation
Free helpline 0808 80 03 344
www.meningitis.org

Meningitis Now
24 hour helpline
0808 80 10 388
www.meningitisnow.org

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis/
- www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/meningitis-b-vaccine/
- www.nhs.uk/vaccinations
- www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/men-acwy-vaccine/



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Minicom: 0300 123 1003
(9am to 6pm, Mon-Fri)

NHS

DON'T IGNORE The signs

Meningitis

Meningitis can kill in hours. It could happen to anyone. It could happen to you!

Be aware, be prepared

Meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning) are rare but severe diseases that can kill or leave people with life changing disabilities and health problems.

Teenagers, and university students in particular, are at increased risk. But you can protect yourself against four kinds of meningococcal disease by getting your free MenACWY vaccine.

Protect yourself with MenACWY vaccine

Most UK teenagers and young adults born after August 1996 have already had MenACWY vaccine but they remain eligible up to their 25th birthday. Students of any nationality entering a UK university for the first time who have not had MenACWY vaccine are also eligible up to their 25th birthday. If you fit either of these groups and have not yet had the vaccine book an appointment with your GP practice now. If you are unsure discuss this with your GP practice.

MenACWY vaccine is very effective at preventing meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia caused by MenA, MenC, MenW and MenY.

But remember that this **vaccine can't prevent all forms of meningitis and septicaemia.** So it is very important that you are aware of the signs and symptoms.

Does MenACWY vaccine protect against Men B?

No, Men B is caused by different strain of the bug which commonly affects young infants. A different vaccine, which protects against MenB, is given to very young babies. Some adults and older children may be eligible on the NHS. You can find out more about how to get the MenB vaccine through the charity websites listed overleaf.

Look out for your friends and fellow students



The glass test

Press the side of a glass firmly against the rash so you can see if it fades under pressure. If it doesn't fade, get medical help immediately. If you are feeling very ill, get help anyway, even if the rash fades or doesn't appear at all.

Know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia

What are the signs and symptoms?

Many of the early signs – vomiting, fever, aches, general tiredness and headaches – are also signs of less serious illnesses like colds and flu but **someone with meningitis or septicaemia will usually become seriously ill in a matter of hours. It is also potentially very serious and can kill.**

This is why it is very important to keep checking someone who is ill so you know if they are getting rapidly worse and to keep looking for signs and symptoms. Seek medical help urgently if you become concerned about their or your own health.

It's important too to look for **cold hands and feet, severe limb pain and pale and blotchy skin**, as these tend to develop early in the illness. Symptoms such as a rash that doesn't fade (do the glass test shown opposite), being confused or delirious, or too sleepy to wake are very serious.

How is meningitis spread?

The bacteria that cause these diseases are spread by **coughing, sneezing and intimate kissing.** Most cases happen individually but outbreaks sometimes occur, usually where people live or work closely together, such as university halls of residence.

Have your MenACWY vaccine at your GP practice. In some areas it may be available at your pharmacy.

Yours sincerely,

Beverley Wasp

**Head of Health Protection
Public Health
Salford City Council**