

Sunday, 4 June 2023

## **NSW urged to stay alert for meningococcal symptoms**

NSW Health is urging the community to be on alert for symptoms of meningococcal disease and act immediately if they appear after the notification of three recent cases.

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but serious and sometimes fatal infection.

Sadly, a person in their fifties from Sydney has died from meningococcal disease.

NSW Health expresses its sincere condolences to their loved ones.

A further two cases of the disease have also been detected in a person in their late teens who had been living in Sydney, and a person in their sixties from the Central Coast. Both individuals are recovering. None of these cases are believed to be linked.

So far this year, there have been 19 cases of meningococcal disease reported in NSW. The majority of cases have been due to the meningococcal B strain of the infection.

NSW Health Director Communicable Diseases, Dr Christine Selvey, said meningococcal disease is a rare disease with babies, toddlers, adolescents, and young adults being at highest risk. While vaccination of these age groups has reduced the number of infections each year, the vaccines do not protect against all strains of meningococcal bacteria and people of all ages can be infected. All people should be aware of symptoms so they can act fast.

“Meningococcal disease can be very serious, but early treatment is life-saving so it is important that symptoms are recognised early,” Dr Selvey said.

“We are urging the NSW community to be vigilant for symptoms, even if they have been vaccinated, and to seek medical assistance early if they are concerned.”

Meningococcal disease can be fatal within hours if left untreated. Knowing the symptoms could help prevent premature death or life-long disability. They include:

- sudden onset of fever
- headache
- neck stiffness
- tiredness
- joint or limb pain
- dislike of bright lights
- nausea and vomiting.
- high-pitched crying in babies
- a rash of red-purple spots or bruises, which may appear after the other symptoms or late in the disease progression

“If symptoms rapidly worsen call Triple Zero (000) or go straight to your nearest emergency department, do not delay,” Dr Selvey said.

Children under five and 15 to 25-year-olds are at the greatest risk of contracting the disease, and babies and adolescents should be vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

Under the National Immunisation Program, meningococcal ACWY (Men ACWY) vaccine is provided free for babies at 12 months, adolescents, and people of all ages with certain medical conditions. In NSW, the adolescent dose is delivered through the school vaccination program in Year 10.

A meningococcal B vaccine is available to children from 6 weeks of age to reduce the risk of infection from this strain of the disease. Aboriginal infants and people with certain medical conditions are eligible for free access to this vaccine under the National Immunisation Program.

For more information on vaccination or symptoms, transmission, risks and treatment of meningococcal disease, see the [NSW Health website](#).