**Important: meningococcal disease information**

**For students following a university case (please read both sides)**

Dear Student

You may be aware that a student at insert name of institution has recently 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. We have been in contact with experienced staff at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and they have advised that no special measures are necessary at the present time.

How the disease spreads

Meningococcal bacteria are commonly carried in the back of the throat but only very rarely cause illness. The bacteria do not spread easily and only those who have had prolonged, close contact with the person who is ill are at a slightly greater risk of becoming ill themselves. The best way to stop the disease spreading is by giving antibiotics to the very close contacts of the person who is ill**.**

**All the close contacts for this case have already been identified and treated.**

People who have not had prolonged, close contact (including classmates, friends, acquaintances, visitors to the flat and so on) are **not** at any greater risk than the rest of the population and do not need antibiotics. Those who have shared drinks, e-cigarettes or cigarettes with the case but have not had prolonged close contact also have no increased risks.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease

Although the risk of another case in the university is very small, 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

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| High temperature | Rapid 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 contact your GP (family doctor) or NHS 111 for advice if you have any concerns about your own or a friend’s health.

If you become worried about yourself or a friend, particularly if symptoms are getting worse, seek medical help **urgently** at the closest Accident and Emergency Department or by dialling 999. Early treatment can be life saving.

Protecting against meningococcal disease

It is important to be aware that meningococcal disease is caused by different groups of meningococcal bacteria. In the UK meningococcal disease is almost always caused by one of four meningococcal groups commonly known as MenB, MenC, MenW or MenY. These groups of meningococcal disease can be prevented with vaccines. MenA disease is rare in the UK but this can also be prevented by vaccination.

MenACWY vaccine is routinely given at 13 to 15 years and was offered to older teenagers as part of a catch-up programme to ensure protection before leaving school. If you were born on or after 1 September 1996 and were eligible but missed your teenage MenACWY vaccine you can still have the vaccine up to your 25th birthday. If you are older and starting university for the first time, you can also have the vaccine up to your 25th birthday. You will need to make an appointment with your GP practice.

Even if you had MenC vaccine when you were younger it is important that you get the MenACWY vaccine as it will boost your protection against MenC disease and protects against more groups of meningococcal disease.

MenB vaccine was introduced into the UK infant programme in 2015 and has only been routinely offered to babies born on or after 1 May 2015.

**Please ensure you are up to date with your vaccinations with your GP practice. Be watchful for signs and symptoms even if you are up to date with vaccinations as available vaccines do not protect against all causes of the disease.**

All meningococcal vaccines offered as part of routine programmes are freely available on the NHS. Vaccines may be available privately for those who are not eligible under these programmes. Meningococcal disease can affect anyone of any age but the national immunisation programmes target those most at risk.

Further information on meningococcal disease is available from:

* The Meningitis Research Foundation, [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org) telephone: 0808 800 3344
* Meningitis Now, [www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org) telephone: 0808 80 10 388 helpline email address: [helpline@meningitisnow.org](mailto:helpline@meningitisnow.org)

If you need further support or advice, please contact insert contact details or call us insert contact telephone number.