KNOW MENINGOCOCCAL

A PARENT’S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Facts and advice you need to know to help protect your child

knowmeningococcal.com.au
WHAT I WANT PARENTS TO KNOW

“Meningococcal disease is rare, but it can be such a devastating disease that it’s something we need to think about in any sick child. What’s tricky is that it’s so difficult to detect.

A child can begin with what seems like a common cold, but can rapidly progress to being critically unwell. It’s often not until a child develops more significant signs of meningococcal disease that it becomes more obvious.

And unfortunately, by then it’s sometimes too late to prevent the severe consequences.

If a child has a fever and rash, parents should take him or her to the doctor.

But they should also ask their doctor about meningococcal vaccination. The most common strains of meningococcal disease can be prevented by vaccination.

Meningococcal disease can be extremely difficult to spot – even for doctors. And it’s potentially preventable. This is why I’m supporting KnowMeningococcal.com.au, so we can all know more and do more to stop this devastating disease.”

Prof. Mike Starr
Paediatrician, Infectious Diseases Physician, Consultant in Emergency Medicine, The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne.
KNOW THE FACTS

WHAT IS MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?
Meningococcal disease is a rare, but potentially devastating bacterial infection of the blood and/or membranes that line the spinal cord and brain.

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE CAN PROGRESS RAPIDLY AND BE HARD TO DIAGNOSE
Meningococcal disease can begin with symptoms such as fever and irritability that are easily mistaken for the common cold. Most children survive meningococcal disease, but if it is not diagnosed and treated quickly it can lead to death within 24 hours.

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE CAN BE DEADLY OR HAVE LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES
Up to one in ten of those infected with meningococcal disease may die, and around one in five may suffer from serious long-term disabilities, including brain damage, deafness or loss of limbs.
Babies and children are most at risk

Meningococcal disease can strike at any age. Babies and children (under five) are most at risk, followed by adolescents. The highest incidence of meningococcal disease is in babies under 12 months of age.

During the early years of life, children have an undeveloped immune system, meaning they are more likely to pick up a strain of meningococcal they are not immunised against or don’t have natural immunity to.

In adolescence, changes in social behaviour that result in close physical contact facilitates spread of disease and can lead to increased risk of meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal bacteria can be spread through sneezing and coughing, close contact and activities such as sharing food and drink.

Meningococcal bacteria can live harmlessly in our throat and nose.

In fact, ~10% of the general population will carry the bacteria at any one time, without ever becoming ill. Adolescents and young adults have the highest rates of carrying the bacteria.
“Riley was one when he went into hospital. He spent his second birthday unconscious. He didn’t have any rash at all when he went to the hospital that morning, but not long after, he was covered in a head to toe purple rash – a sign, I now know, means the disease was very advanced in his small body.

The doctors took one look at him and he was quickly rushed out the back, where he was sedated, put on a breathing tube and pumped full of antibiotics. Once he was stabilised, that’s when we were told it was meningococcal disease.

I hope by sharing my family’s story, I can help build greater awareness around meningococcal disease and help other families, even if it’s just one family, not go through what we’ve been through.”

“Riley surprised everyone with how strong he was and how hard he fought for his life. He won his battle against meningococcal disease, but not without sacrifices. He may be a little different in his physical appearance, but he’s still Riley, he’s still my little boy.”
KNOW THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of meningococcal disease can be difficult to recognise, and can easily be mistaken for a common cold or virus.

Common symptoms of meningococcal disease amongst babies and young children may include:

- High fever
- Refusal to eat
- Difficulty waking or extreme tiredness
- Vomiting
- Pale, grey or blotchy skin
- Cold hands and feet
- Sensitivity to light
- High-pitched, moaning cry
- A bulging fontanelle (soft spot on top of the head)

IN BABIES ONLY:
MENINGOCOCCAL RASH

The distinctive meningococcal rash is an advanced symptom of meningococcal septicaemia (blood poisoning) which may or may not occur. The rash may start with a simple spot or blister, which may quickly progress to red pinpricks like small mosquito bites, and/or spread rapidly into purple like blotches. The rash is non-blanching, meaning that it does not fade when you apply pressure to the skin (for example by pressing a clear drinking glass against the skin).

It’s important that you don’t wait for this rash to appear before seeking medical intervention.
“I feel like I didn’t have a chance to be told about what meningococcal disease is, the early signs, and I wasn’t informed about vaccines before this happened to our family. We can’t be complacent and just think it’s never going to happen to us.”

“When Jenna got unwell, we really didn’t think much of it at first. Thinking that Jenna had already had her vaccination against meningococcal disease and was protected, I didn’t look into it. I remember in hospital, she didn’t even look like our child anymore. Her body was so swollen, the rash had gone from a few spots to just a purple rash covering her whole body. Now we just take each day as it comes. One step at a time.”
Early recognition and treatment of meningococcal offers the best chance of recovery. If you’re concerned about your child’s health, monitor for signs and symptoms and seek advice from a healthcare professional.

While practicing good hygiene can help to protect against the spread of germs, vaccination is the only truly effective way to help prevent meningococcal disease.

Globally, there are 13 different strains of meningococcal bacteria, of which there are six main strains that most commonly cause disease (A, B, C, W, X and Y).

No single vaccine can protect against all strains of meningococcal disease, but different vaccines are available to protect against the most common ones.

Currently in Australia, strains B, W and Y cause the majority of disease. In recent years the number of reported cases of meningococcal disease has increased with cases in 2017 caused by:  

- **STRAIN W**: 37%
- **STRAIN Y**: 20%
- **STRAIN B**: 36%
- **STRAIN C**: 4%
- **UNCLASSIFIED**: 4%

Total exceeds 100% due to rounding.
FREE GOVERNMENT VACCINES MAY NOT COVER ALL COMMON MENINGOCOCCAL STRAINS FOR THOSE AT RISK.

SPEAK TO YOUR DOCTOR FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE AND VACCINATION OPTIONS.

For more information, and to hear from parents who have experience with meningococcal disease, visit knowmeningococcal.com.au
“They told Mum if I’d been another 15 minutes I might not have had the same luck”
“Ashley was 16, it wasn’t long before her Grade 12 exams. She’d been off school for a week with Flu and complained about a sore neck and then a headache. At the doctor’s they gave her an injection to stop her vomiting and told us to take her home. But I wouldn’t leave without a blood test. Within the hour, there was a call to take her straight to the hospital.

I had trouble waking her and by the time I finally did, she had a pin prick rash everywhere. When they finally mentioned the word meningococcal we were just so stunned. She spent about six days in an induced coma. Before they finally brought her around they warned us that there was a 50% chance of brain damage.

Ashley’s lucky that she hasn’t had any long-term effects that we know of, although she does feel that her memory isn’t as good as it once was.

I say to every mother – don’t worry, just go. If you think there’s something wrong – stick to your guns. It happens so fast that’s why you need to act.”

“YOU THINK IT HAPPENS, BUT NOT TO YOUR OWN FAMILY”
SHARE WHAT YOU NOW KNOW

MAKE SURE YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE.

JUST SCAN THE CODE BELOW

REFERENCES:

GlaxoSmithKline Australia Pty Ltd. Melbourne, VIC. ABN 47 100 162 481
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