

Meningococcal Disease

Information for close contacts who require clearance antibiotics

There are *three* fact sheets for meningococcal disease:

- a general fact sheet,
- this fact sheet for people who are close contacts of someone with the disease,
- and a fact sheet about antibiotic clearance.

Close contacts of patients with meningococcal disease should:

- **Watch out for symptoms** of meningococcal disease and **see a doctor urgently if any symptoms develop.**
- **Take clearance antibiotics** as they have been prescribed.
- **Tell your close contacts to watch out for symptoms of meningococcal disease and see a doctor urgently if they develop symptoms.**
- **Read the fact sheets and carry them with you** for the next two weeks – you may need to read them again.

Around 5-10% of the population carry meningococcal bacteria in their nose and throat at any given time, but very few people become unwell as a result. Meningococcal bacteria only survive in humans and are transmitted from person to person through contact with respiratory secretions.

You have been in close contact with a person who has been diagnosed with meningococcal disease. The person with meningococcal disease has become unwell after close contact with someone who carries the bacteria. It is possible that one of the cases' close contacts, including you, may be carrying meningococcal bacteria in their nose or throat.

As a possible carrier of meningococcal bacteria, there is a small risk that you could pass the bacteria on to other close contacts. Clearance antibiotics will help clear meningococcal bacteria from your nose and throat and prevent you from being able to pass it on to other people.

As a possible carrier there is also a small chance that that you could develop meningococcal disease over the next few days or weeks. It is important that you and your close contacts know the symptoms of meningococcal disease and see a doctor urgently if symptoms develop. The clearance antibiotics you will take are **not** a treatment for meningococcal disease, so it is important for you to see a doctor urgently if you get symptoms.

What symptoms should I, and my close contacts watch for?

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Drowsiness
- Neck stiffness
- Joint or muscle pain
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Rash (red-purple spots or bruises)
- Vomiting
- Very early symptoms may include leg pain, cold hands and abnormal skin colour
- Young children and infants may have more general symptoms including irritability, high-pitched crying and refusing feeds.

Seek urgent medical advice if you have any of these symptoms. Tell the doctor you have been in close contact with someone with meningococcal disease and take this information sheet with you.

A rash may NOT be present at all or may be a very LATE sign

What is a close contact?

A close contact is a person who has had close contact with the person with meningococcal disease in the 7 days before they became ill, or those in very close contact after the onset of the cases symptoms. This could be because they:

- lived or stayed overnight in the same house,
- intimately kissed (deep mouth kissing),
- attended the same childcare centre class as them; or
- are a health care worker who was *directly* exposed to the patient's respiratory secretions via mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or intubation.

What about my contacts?

People whom YOU (the contact) have been in contact with do not need to take clearance antibiotics, unless they are also a *close* contact of the person with meningococcal disease. It is important for you to:

- Alert your close contacts to be aware of symptoms of meningococcal disease and seek urgent medical attention if they develop these symptoms.
- Share the Meningococcal Disease fact sheet with your family and friends.

Clearing meningococcal bacteria from the throat

- Some antibiotics are used to clear the meningococcal bacteria from the nose and throat and prevent the spread to other people. These 'clearance antibiotics' are rifampicin, ciprofloxacin or ceftriaxone. Antibiotics normally work in about 24 hours.
- Clearance antibiotics do not treat the infection once it has started to invade the body. People who are ill with meningococcal disease need to be in hospital and treated with appropriate antibiotics.
- All antibiotics have a small risk of side effects. Those who need antibiotics are asked about other medicines they are taking, their allergies and if they are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- It is important to read and understand the separate information sheet about the antibiotic that has been prescribed for you.

Immunisation

There are vaccines which protect against some types of meningococcal disease. Laboratory tests usually take a few days to determine the type of meningococcus that caused the illness in your close contact. If it is found to be a type that can be covered by a vaccine, the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) Section staff will contact you to recommend a meningococcal vaccine.

Remain vigilant in looking for the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease even if you have previously been vaccinated. This is because vaccination against one type of meningococcus bacteria will not protect you from the other types.

Need more information?

For more information about meningococcal disease, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Meningococcal Disease is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to the Health Directorate, ACT Government are investigated by Public Health Officers.

Acknowledgments

1. Australian Government, Department of Health, Invasive Meningococcal Disease SoNG 2014 (revised March 2017). Available at:
<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/cdna-song-imd.htm>

2. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). *The Australian Immunisation Handbook* 10th ed (2017 update). Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health, 2017. Available at: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/meningococcal-disease>
3. Heymann DL. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. 20th edn. Washington: American Public Health Association, USA; 2015.

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If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.



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