

Meningococcal Disease Contact Information

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has been notified of a confirmed or suspected case of meningococcal disease. The action taken by the DHS public health staff is the same regardless of whether the case is confirmed or suspected.

Meningococcal bacteria live naturally in the back of the nose and throat of approximately 10% of the population. There are many strains of meningococci and most cause no harm. Occasionally, however, a disease-causing meningococcal strain is passed to someone who has no immunity to these bacteria and this can result in a case of meningococcal disease.

The bacteria are difficult to spread and are only passed from person to person by regular close, prolonged contact. Recent studies have shown that contact with saliva from the front of the mouth, teeth or lips will rarely pass the bacteria from person to person. The bacteria die very quickly when outside the body.

Only people who have been in **very** close contact with a suspected or confirmed case need to take special antibiotics to clear the bacteria from the back of the throat. This includes household contacts, those who have stayed overnight in the seven days before the case became unwell and intimate contacts such as a boyfriend/ girlfriend/ sexual partner.

Persons requiring antibiotics are contacted directly by the Department of Human Services.

These 'clearance' antibiotics do not treat meningococcal disease but may prevent disease-causing strains being passed on to others.

Although the risk of contacts developing meningococcal disease is extremely low, it is important to look out for the symptoms listed below. It may take up to seven days for the signs of meningococcal disease to appear.

Infants and young children

Fever
Refusing to take feeds
Irritability, fretfulness, grunting or moaning
Extreme tiredness
Floppiness
Dislike of being handled
Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
Turning away from light (photophobia)
Convulsions or twitching
Rash of red-purple pinprick spots or larger bruises

Older children and adults

Fever
Headache
General malaise
Neck stiffness
Discomfort when looking at bright lights (photophobia)
Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
Muscles aches
Painful or swollen joints and/or difficulty walking
Moaning, unintelligible speech
Drowsiness
Confusion
Collapse
Rash of red-purple pinprick spots or larger bruises

Signs and symptoms can appear very quickly, and people with meningococcal disease can get much worse within a few hours. You know your family and close friends better than anybody else. If you or someone close to you has some of these symptoms and appears to you to be much sicker than usual, seek medical attention from your doctor or nearest hospital emergency department immediately. Please take this letter with you to show your doctor.

For Further Information contact the Department of Human Services on: 1300 65 11 60 or your local doctor