

Dear Parents and Guardians,

You may be aware of three local cases of invasive meningococcal disease (meningitis) amongst young people in the Reading area including, very sadly, one death.

We understand that parents, guardians and students may be feeling anxious as a result. I wanted to take the time to share the detail below for your information and reassurance.

Please be assured that the risk to others in the wider local area remains very low. There is no need for you to make any change to your school routine and no reason for pupils to be kept at home.

We are working very closely with expert public health teams at UKHSA to manage the local situation and response, and they have been identifying close contacts of cases, and arranging antibiotics as a precaution for those who need them.

About invasive meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease (meningitis and septicaemia) is an uncommon but serious disease caused by meningococcal bacteria.

The onset of illness is often sudden, and early diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics are vital. While meningococcal disease can affect all ages, recent outbreaks have shown that older children, teenagers and young adults, particularly those in shared settings such as schools, colleges and universities, are more likely to be affected.

How invasive meningococcal disease spreads

Meningococcal infection doesn't spread very easily. The bacteria can only be passed to others after a long period of close contact, for example living with someone in shared accommodation, through prolonged kissing or sharing vapes.

People may be offered preventive antibiotics for close contacts who have been identified as having had significant, close contact with someone with meningococcal disease in the last 7 days.

What you need to do

Although meningococcal disease is uncommon and the risk locally remains very low, it is also important that parents and pupils are aware and alert to the signs and symptoms of invasive meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly, so it's important that parents and pupils are aware of the signs and symptoms. You should seek urgent medical help if you or your child develops any symptoms of meningococcal disease or sepsis, which can include

- a rash that doesn't fade when pressed with a glass
- sudden onset of high fever
- severe and worsening headache
- stiff neck
- vomiting and diarrhoea
- joint and muscle pain
- dislike of bright lights
- very cold hands and feet
- seizures
- confusion/delirium
- extreme sleepiness/difficulty waking

Call 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E immediately if you think you or someone you look after could have meningitis or sepsis. Use [NHS 111 online](#) or call [NHS 111](#) for advice if you're not sure if it's anything serious.

You can find out more information about meningitis and where to seek help and advice at [Meningitis - Symptoms - NHS](#). And this Blog from UKHSA: [What is meningitis? Symptoms, risks and how to protect yourself – UK Health Security Agency](#)

Vaccination

Targeted vaccination for meningitis B will be offered to a specific higher-risk group who have been identified through the contact tracing process, but please note this is not recommended more widely at this time.

The best way to protect your child's health is with free NHS vaccines (injections). The vaccines don't protect from all types (strains) of this bacteria. The NHS offers two main meningococcal vaccines: MenB and MenACWY.

- The MenB vaccine protects against meningococcal group B and is given routinely to babies at 8 weeks, 12 weeks, and a booster at 1 year. Babies born on or after the 1st May 2015 are offered this vaccine on the NHS. Catch-up is limited, as children who miss doses can usually only receive them up to the age of 2, with no routine NHS programme for older children or teenagers. Teenagers in the UK are not routinely offered the MenB vaccine because the programme is focused on protecting babies, who are at highest risk. [Men B vaccine factsheet](#). There are different types of Men B vaccine which protect against slightly different strains of Men B disease.
- The MenACWY vaccine protects against meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y and is routinely offered to teenagers in school (typically in years 9–10, around age 13–15) as a single dose. A broader catch-up programme is available for those who missed the vaccine, allowing vaccination up to the age of 25, with particular emphasis on young adults entering university who may be at higher risk. [Men ACWY vaccine factsheet](#).

I hope you find this information is helpful at this time. For more information, please visit the **NHS website** <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis/> or visit the websites of two charities who offer free support, along with helpline numbers:

The Meningitis Research Foundation

www.meningitis.org

Helpline UK 080 8800 3344

Meningitis Now

www.meningitisnow.org

Helpline 0808 80 10 388

or helpline@meningitisnow.org

Yours sincerely,



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