Meningococcal Disease

Dear Parents & Staff,

There have been reports in the Illawarra and at the school concerning an outbreak of Meningococcal Disease.

A bacterial germ called meningococcus causes this disease. About 10% of healthy adults and children carry the meningococcus germ in the nose and throat, usually without any problem. The bacteria are difficult to spread, however occasionally carriers may pass it on to others who have been in regular close contact with them. If exposed to the bacterium it may take up to ten days for the infection to develop.

Antibiotics are only recommended for close contacts, such as household members and others who have stayed overnight in the same residence, and are not indicated for fellow students or staff members. The antibiotic does not treat the disease; it is given to clear the bacteria from the throat. Different antibiotics are needed if symptoms develop.

The risk of other children at the school developing this infection is very small but it is important that if your child becomes unwell, you seek medical advice as soon as possible. Most people with meningococcal disease are successfully treated and make a full recovery; however it may cause serious infection, such as meningitis and septicaemia, and sometimes can be life-threatening.

The symptoms of meningococcal disease to lookout for include a combination of:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Sore joints and muscles
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- A pin-prick rash may appear anywhere on the skin and this can quickly change into large red-purple blotches. Usually this rash does not disappear with light pressure on the skin. Sometimes a rash does not appear at all.
- Very early symptoms may include leg pain, cold hands and feet and abnormal skin colour.

Young children may have more general symptoms that may include irritability, drowsiness or difficulty waking, high-pitched or moaning cry, pale and blotchy skin, and refusing to eat.

Even if your child has had meningococcal vaccine you still need to look out for symptoms because the vaccine doesn’t protect against all meningococcal strains.

Although the risk is very small, it is important that if your child becomes sick during the next month, you should take him/her to see your GP or casualty doctor with the above in mind.

Please keep this letter and take it with you if your child needs medical attention.

If you have any questions, please ring the Infectious Diseases Team at the Public Health, on 42216700. Further information is also available on the NSW Health website:


Yours sincerely

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