

23 October 2009

### **Local health unit acts on meningococcal case**

Queensland Health has undertaken preventative measures for childcare centre and family contacts of a 15-month-old boy confirmed as having a meningococcal infection.

The boy attends Sunkids Childcare Centre at Hillcrest in Logan City south of Brisbane, and is being treated in hospital.

“Queensland Health’s Logan public health unit has sent a team to the centre this morning to meet with staff and parents,” Chief Health Officer Dr Jeannette Young said.

“Household and other prolonged close contacts of the case in the seven days prior to the onset of illness will be assessed by Public Health for chemoprophylaxis (treatment with appropriate drugs).

“Meningococcal disease is an acute bacterial disease causing meningitis and/or septicaemia.

“It should be noted that chemoprophylaxis will not stop disease if infection is already present, so contacts will be made aware of signs and symptoms of the disease.

“Depending on the site of infection it is frequently characterised by sudden onset of all or several of the following; fever, intense headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck and a petechial (a minute red or purple spot on the surface of the skin as the result of tiny haemorrhages of blood vessels)

“It is not easy to catch the disease although the germ is spread in droplets shed from the nose or throat through coughing, sneezing and spluttering. The meningococcal germ does not survive for long outside the body,” Dr Young said.

This year to 18 October there have been 46 cases in Queensland. In recent years the total annual number has ranged from 62 in 2005 to 105 in 2003. Since 2003 there have been 25 deaths, one this year.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Meningococcal disease is a rare but very serious illness. Symptoms may appear quickly and progress rapidly.

**Symptoms:** The symptoms of meningococcal disease don’t appear in any particular order and may appear differently in different people, but typical symptoms are:

.....2

## *Local health unit acts on meningococcal case 2*

In adults and older children: vomiting, fever, headache, stiff neck, dislike of bright lights, drowsiness, joint pain, rash of red-purple spots or bruises.

In babies: fever – hands and feet may also feel cold, refusing feeds or vomiting, high pitched moaning cry or whimpering, dislike of being handled, fretful, rash of red-purple spots or bruises, blank and staring expression, bulging fontanelle, difficult to wake, lethargic, pale blotchy complexion

A recent study of children under 16 years of age in the United Kingdom has shown that leg pain, cold extremities, and abnormal skin colour, are frequently seen in the first 12 hours of meningococcal disease.

If anyone has any of these symptoms, they should seek urgent medical attention. Early treatment can sometimes prevent serious complications.

After exposure to the bacteria, it usually takes from two to four days to become ill, although sometimes it can be slightly longer.

**Vaccination:** Some types of meningococcal disease can be prevented with vaccination. In Australia, B and C strains are responsible for the majority of cases of meningococcal disease. Vaccination against meningococcal C strain is recommended for all children at 12 months of age as part of the Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule. There is no vaccine available in Australia for protection against the B strain.

**Cause:** Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called meningococci. There are different groups of meningococci however it is mainly group B and group C that cause disease in Australia. Meningococcal bacteria are carried harmlessly at the back of the throat or in the nose in about 10% of the community at any given time. Although most people who have these bacteria in their throat or nose remain quite well, they are able to spread the bacteria to others, and a few of these people may subsequently become ill.

Meningococcal disease occurs in two main forms or it can occur as a combination of these two forms. Meningococcal septicaemia is the condition that occurs when the germ invades the bloodstream and causes blood poisoning. Meningococcal meningitis is the condition that occurs when the germ infects the outer lining around the brain and the spinal cord.

(ends)

*Media contact: 3234 0856/3234 1439*