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MEDIA STATEMENT: For Immediate Release

UPDATE ON THE MENINGOCOCCAL C OUTBREAK IN FIJI

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has released the revised *Meningococcal Disease Public Health Management Guideline* to all medical practitioners in Fiji. This is to ensure they have access to the latest information and guidance for the clinical management of patients, and the public health response in communities during this outbreak.

Appropriate antibiotics are also now accessible in the Health Subdivisions.

Update on cases

From this week (week of March 26th) the Ministry is reporting both confirmed and suspected cases. Therefore, there have been a total of 38 cases from January 1st to March 29th, 2018. Of these, 20 cases are laboratory confirmed, and 18 suspected based on clinical signs and symptoms and/or links to another case.

Last week (week of March 19th) there were 3 cases reported, and this week (week of March 26th) there were another 3 cases. There has been an average of 2 cases per week in the last 4 weeks.

Navesau Adventist School

Of the 38 cases so far in 2018, there were 6 from Navesau Adventist School in Tailevu. Two of the cases from this week (week of March 26th) were diagnosed and transferred to the hospital following a visit to the school by the Team from Nayavu Health Centre as part of the Ministry's public health response to the previously reported cases.

None of the 2018 deaths to date have been from Navesau Adventist School.

Since report of the first case at Navesau Adventist School the Nayavu Health Centre team, the Tailevu Subdivisional Team, and the Central Division Team have made daily school visits where they have administered preventative antibiotics to all students and teachers.

The Ministry is in the process of procuring emergency vaccines for this school. This is expected to be given to the students next week.

Advice on vaccination

The Ministry is aware private pharmacies have brought in vaccines. To be clear: only vaccines for meningococcal C will be effective in preventing you from getting meningococcal C during this outbreak. This includes the meningococcal C conjugate vaccine (brands include: Neis-vac, Menitorix) and the quadrivalent ACWY conjugate vaccine (brands include: Menactra, Menveo, Nimenrix). Please be aware that these are expensive vaccines, and we encourage the public to check with multiple pharmacies before purchasing, as we have been made aware that some are charging significantly higher prices than others. The

Ministry is currently working with the Fijian Consumer and Competition Commission to prevent price gouging in Fiji's pharmacies.

Please keep in mind that vaccination is not a cure, it is only meant to prevent you from getting meningococcal C. We continue to strongly encourage the public to take simple preventative measures such as practicing proper hygiene, and identifying the early symptoms of the disease.

What should the community do?

Whilst meningococcal disease is still a rare disease in Fiji, the Ministry strongly encourages everyone to take simple steps to protect themselves and their loved ones:

- 1) Be alert for the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and go immediately to the nearest health facility if you or your loved ones have any of these symptoms; and
- 2) Practice good hygiene to help prevent the spread of the bacteria.

For more information, on prevention, and the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, please visit the *Your Health* section of the Ministry's website: <http://www.health.gov.fj>

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