

Frequently Asked Questions

Meningococcal disease

What is Meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is a rare but potentially deadly disease caused by the bacteria *Neisseria Meningitidis*. It can cause infections in the lining of the brain (meningitis) and in the blood (meningococemia), or both. These conditions can cause a person to become seriously sick.

How is the bacteria spread?

- The bacteria is spread from person-to-person via saliva or spit. This can happen when a person:
 - with the bacteria coughs or sneezes on an uninfected person, or kisses an uninfected person on the mouth.
 - shares drinks from the same glass/cup, bottle, or bowl e.g. sharing water bottles, kava bowls, or taki at nightclub.
- Not everyone who has the bacteria will get the disease.
- Approximately 10% of the population will carry the bacteria at any given time but will not get sick. This is because the bacteria doesn't get into the bloodstream to cause the disease.

Who can get sick from the disease?

- Anyone can get meningococcal disease. However, babies, children, teenagers and young adults are most at risk of getting sick.
- There is an increased risk of the bacteria spreading in boarding schools and between people living within the same house.
- Babies and children under 5 years are also more likely to get sick because they have less developed immune systems and also share objects that are placed in their mouths.
- People who have certain medical conditions are also at increased risk.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- A person typically gets the signs and symptoms within 3 to 7 days of getting the bacteria.
- Symptoms for **children, teenagers and young adults** include sudden fever, vomiting, headache, and stiff neck/backache. Other symptoms include:
 - Nausea
 - Eyes are sensitive to light
 - Confusion
 - Rash – red/purple spots in the skin

- It can be difficult to notice the symptoms in **babies and younger children**, or they may not be there at all. Some of the symptoms that you should be alert for are:
 - High fever
 - Unusual crying
 - Refusing to eat or drink
 - Vomiting
 - Floppy/drowsy
 - changes in sleeping patterns
 - Seizures or Fits
 - Rash – red/purple spots on the skin

Please note: rash might also develop, which can start off as a pink/red or purple spot, that later turns into purple patches. This is a late and **extremely critical stage of the disease**, and you must be at the hospital to be treated urgently.

How can I prevent the spread of the bacteria?

Practice proper hygiene to prevent the spread of the disease

- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue or handkerchief when coughing and sneezing.
- Dispose tissue in the bin, wash handkerchief daily with soap and water
- After coughing or sneezing, wash your hands with soap and water.
- Don't share drinks from the same glass/cup, bottle, or bowl e.g. sharing water bottles, kava bowls, or taki at nightclub.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

- Doctors treat meningococcal disease with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important that treatment start as soon as possible. If a doctor suspects meningococcal disease, they will give the patient antibiotics right away. Antibiotics help prevent a person from seriously getting sick.

What happens when I do not receive treatment?

Receiving early treatment is critical for someone who gets the disease. Globally, 50% of people who got the disease died when they did not get treatment.

- Most people who get the disease and are treated appropriately will recover fully, however 10-15% will still die, and around 20% will have permanent disabilities.

Is vaccination the only cure for meningococcal disease in Fiji?

- There are five major types of meningococcal disease, including C, the most common type currently in Fiji. Vaccines can be used to prevent someone from getting sick from the bacteria, however there is no universal vaccine for the different types of the bacteria.
- Please keep in mind that **vaccination is not a cure**, it is only meant to prevent you from getting meningococcal C. We strongly encourage that you take simple preventative measures such as practicing proper hygiene, and knowing the early symptoms of the disease to protect yourself and your family.

- The Ministry continues to investigate the use of vaccines in preventing the further spread of meningococcal C in Fiji.

Where can I get meningococcal vaccine from?

- We are aware that some members of the public may wish to purchase the vaccines from private pharmacies. We advise that only vaccines for meningococcal C that will be effective in preventing you from getting meningococcal C during this outbreak 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, however, 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.

Where can I go for help and treatment?

- If you notice any of the symptoms mentioned above, you must immediately **go to your nearest health facility**. It is critical, medical treatment will give a sick person the best chance of survival.
- You can also visit the *Ministry of Health and Medical Services* website <http://www.health.gov.fj/> for more information, go to *Your Health* section search and select [Meningococcal Disease](#).