

05-12-18

Media Advisory

Fijians Urged to Take Precautions when Travelling in New Zealand Following Confirmation of MenW Outbreak

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services wishes to advise Fijians to take extra precautions when travelling to New Zealand following the confirmation from health authorities in New Zealand, and the World Health Organisation, of an outbreak of serogroup W meningococcal disease (MenW).

This particular strain of MenW affects all age groups and is associated with a high number of fatalities.

Northland has reported the most cases during this outbreak in 2018; therefore Fijians should be especially mindful when planning visits to this area.

If travelling to New Zealand, the Ministry advises Fijians to:

- 1) Be alert for the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and visit the nearest health facility if you have these symptoms.
- 2) Practice good hygiene to prevent yourself from contracting the bacteria.

Common symptoms of the disease include:

- Symptoms of meningococcal disease, especially for **older children and 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**, 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

- In addition to the common symptoms of the disease, some MenW patients in New Zealand have also had gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. diarrhoea), pneumonia, and/or joint pain.
- This is a deadly disease. If a person has the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, they should seek urgent medical treatment.

For more information on prevention, and the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, please visit the 'Meningococcal Disease' page in the 'Your Health' section of the Ministry's website

<http://www.health.gov.fj>

Ends.....

Meningococcal Disease Information Sheet

- Meningococcal disease is a life-threatening 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 are very serious and can be deadly.

Meningococcal disease is very serious but can be treated if detected early

- Meningococcal disease can only be treated at a health facility with antibiotic medication (medicines that kills bacteria in the body) specifically used for this disease. People with meningococcal disease will be admitted to hospital.
- Identifying the symptoms and seeking urgent medical treatment at a health facility is critical and will give a sick person the best chance of survival. In previous outbreaks worldwide, up to 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 8-12% will still die, and around 20% will have permanent disabilities (e.g. severe brain damage).
- If you notice signs and symptoms of this disease, you must urgently visit your nearest health facility.
- A person may start to feel sick within 3 to 7 days after coming in contact with the bacteria.
- It is critical that everyone knows the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, so they can seek immediate medical treatment if they suspect meningococcal disease.

Signs and symptoms of Meningococcal Disease

- Symptoms of meningococcal disease, especially for **older children and 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**, 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
- This is a deadly disease. If a person has the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease, they require urgent medical treatment.

Meningococcal Disease is Spread from Person to Person

- The meningococcal disease bacteria are not easily transmitted but are spread from person to person via transfer of saliva or spit. This can happen when a person with the bacteria coughs on an uninfected person, or deeply kisses an uninfected person on the mouth. It may also spread through the sharing of drinks from the same glass/cup/water bottle or bowl e.g. kava, or taki alcohol at a nightclub.
- Babies and children under the age of 5 frequently put things into their mouths, therefore they are at higher risk of getting the bacteria.
- Not everyone who has the bacteria will get the disease. Approximately 10-20% of the general population will carry the bacteria at the back of their nose and mouth from time to time, but will not have symptoms. This is because the bacteria need to get into the bloodstream to cause the disease.

Certain People are at Increased Risk for Meningococcal Disease

- Anyone can get meningococcal disease. However, babies, children, teenagers and young adults are the most at risk of getting meningococcal disease.
- There is an increased risk of meningococcal disease spreading in boarding schools and between people living within the same house.
- People who have certain medical conditions that weaken their immune systems are also at increased risk.

Prevention

- Practicing proper hygiene can help 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 eating utensils, cups/glasses/water bottles, drinks at social gathering (taki), cigarettes, or kava bowls.

For more information please visit your nearest health facility or the 'My Health Section' on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services website <http://www.health.gov.fj>