Meningococcal Disease

Prompt diagnosis of meningococcal septicaemia and meningitis and preadmission treatment of presumptive cases can be life-saving

Consider a diagnosis of meningococcal disease if signs and symptoms include:

In children and adults:
- Fever, pallor, rigors, sweats.
- Headache, neck stiffness, photophobia, backache, cranial nerve palsy.
- Vomiting and/or nausea, and sometimes diarrhoea.
- Lethargy, drowsiness, irritability, confusion, agitation, seizures or altered conscious state.
- Moaning, unintelligible speech.
- Painful or swollen joints, myalgia; difficulty walking.
- Whilst the absence of a rash does not exclude meningococcal disease, note in particular any haemorrhagic rash, particularly of a pinprick, petechial or purpuric appearance.

In infants and young children the following may also occur:
- Irritability, dislike of being handled.
- Tiredness, floppiness, drowsiness.
- Twitching or convulsions.
- Grunting or moaning.
- Turning from light.

Note in particular:
- Rapid deterioration in clinical condition.
- Repeat presentations to surgery/hospital.
- Normally calm friends/relatives who are more worried than symptoms apparently justify.

Actions
Carry benzylpenicillin in the doctor’s bag. If meningococcal disease is suspected:

Immediately
1. Call an ambulance.
2. Administer antibiotics IV (IM if IV impossible).
3. Only if possible, collect blood for culture.

Immediate antibiotic therapy (all ages)
Empirical therapy prior to hospitalisation:
- Benzylpenicillin: 60 mg/kg up to 3g IV/IM or;
- Ceftriaxone: 50 mg/kg up to 2g IV/IM.
- Penicillin should only be withheld in cases who have a definite history of anaphylaxis. If in doubt, check with Infectious Diseases Physician at nearest hospital.

Notification
All cases of meningococcal disease, whether suspected or confirmed, must be notified immediately, by telephone, to the Communicable Disease Section of the Department of Human Services, who offer a 24 hour/7 day service.

The Communicable Disease Section is responsible for identification of contacts who require preventive antibiotics, and other public health aspects of this disease.

Telephone all hours 1300 651160