

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 pinpoint, 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.** and;
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.

