

MENINGITIS & MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE THE BARE FACTS

What is meningitis?

- Meningitis is a range of serious and life-threatening diseases involving inflammation of the meninges (the membrane lining the brain and spinal cord) caused through infection by viruses, bacteria, fungi and other micro-organisms.
- The most common form is bacterial meningitis which is life-threatening and can cause death with hours if not promptly and properly treated. Some of the bacteria that cause meningitis can also cause septicemia – infection of the blood which can damage blood vessels and body organs.
- The bacteria causing meningococcal meningitis lives in the throat and is spread through sneezing, coughing, sharing of utensils, etc.
- Death occurs in 10-20% of cases, while 20% of patients are left with permanent damage and disabilities including deafness, learning difficulties, cerebral palsy, brain damage or limb amputations.
- Māori are at particular risk of contracting the disease and not receiving timely treatment.
- People in close living conditions are in the high-risk groups for infection.

Diagnosis, treatment and prevention

- Because meningitis presents symptoms similar to the common flu it can be hard to diagnose.
- Early diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics may lead to a recovery with few or no long-term impacts.
- Meningococcal meningitis is largely preventable through vaccination.
- Two vaccines are required for the best possible protection – Bexsero for the meningococcal B strain and Menactra for the meningococcal A, C, W & Y strains.
- Each vaccine dose currently costs around \$150, and according to age a booster dose may be required.
- Cost is a significant barrier for many families.

The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand

- The Meningitis Foundation is a charitable organisation set up in 2010 to educate New Zealanders and raise their awareness of meningitis, promoting prevention and control by:
 - providing timely, accurate and credible information and educational resources to the general public and healthcare professionals
 - providing a forum for friends and families affected by meningitis to connect and share their stories for mutual support and ongoing awareness of the reality of the disease
 - being an active voice to support public health policy and the introduction of further vaccines to high risk groups
 - supporting an increase in vaccination rates to improve New Zealand's record for protecting children.

Foundation goals

- The Meningitis Foundation's overarching objective is to actively reduce and prevent meningitis in New Zealand by ensuring families have accurate information on the disease, and access to preventative measures, early diagnosis and treatment.
- The Foundation has set a goal of having every college student protected against all preventable forms of the disease before they leave school, by 2025.
- In March 2022, the Foundation took a 6,357-signature petition to Parliament seeking funding of the vaccines for the meningococcal B and A, C, W & Y strains for all Year 11 students and 16-year-olds.

Further information

For more information or to contact the Foundation:

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