

Meningitis B Bristol session: Frequently asked questions

How many Meningitis B cases have there been linked to this social network in Bristol?

There have been four cases of meningococcal disease over a 15 month period in a social network of young people who have had previous links to St Brendan's College, Bristol. All four cases were caused by a group B strain of the meningococcal bacteria (Men B).

What is Meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious bacterial infection caused by meningococcal bacteria. People with meningococcal disease can develop meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain), septicemia (blood poisoning) or both. Healthy young children, teenagers and young adults have a higher risk of meningococcal disease compared to the rest of the population. Meningococcal bacteria belonging to group B (Men B) are responsible for most meningococcal infections in the UK and across Europe. This is not because these are more virulent but because infections caused by other strains have declined following the introduction of population immunisation programmes such as MenC and MenACWY.

How contagious is Meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal bacteria are carried in the back of the throat of about one in ten people at any one time, but only very rarely cause illness. Most people who carry the bacteria become immune to them. The bacteria do not spread easily unless there is prolonged, close ('normally household') contact with a carrier of the bacteria.

Are students at more risk if they attend St Brendan's?

The risk of infection for those at this college would be the same as anybody else in the wider population. We do know that carriage of the bacteria is slightly higher in teenagers which is why we sometimes see slightly more cases in this age group. We have very recently identified social links between the most recent case and previous cases, including the two students of St Brendan's who sadly died.

What health advice has previously been given?

Public Health England has been working with the families of the students who sadly died and with St Brendan's college to provide advice on meningococcal disease, the signs and symptoms to watch out for, and what steps to take if people become unwell. All close (household) contacts of the cases have been identified and have already been given antibiotics.

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What further action is Public Health England taking?

Public Health England (PHE) has arranged Men B vaccination for a defined social

network group consisting of approximately 150 additional contacts that have been identified and are being personally contacted. These individuals are being offered antibiotics and vaccination. Vaccination is being recommended to protect against the Men B strain which has caused the infection in these four individuals.

Why are you only vaccinating this group of people?

The evidence obtained through extensive investigation shows that the highest risk of meningococcal disease is to this defined social network.

People who have not had prolonged, close contact with the cases are NOT at any greater risk than the rest of the college or general population and do not need antibiotics or vaccination.

I am a student / staff member at St Brendan's College but I am not in this target group for the vaccination and / or have not been invited. Am I at risk?

The advice of PHE is that all other students / staff at the college and the wider population are NOT at any greater risk from meningitis than the rest of the population. We are reassured by this expert advice and the college remains open for business as usual.

While people who have prolonged, close contact with an ill person are at a slightly increased risk of becoming unwell, PHE has assured that meningococcal infection is not highly contagious, is rare, and the risk of transmission within the general population is very low.

I am a student at St Brendan's College, why can't I have it?

Following an extensive investigation, it has been decided to vaccinate only a defined social network. All of the four cases are among this network and this is why steps are being taken to reduce the risk of further infection among this particular group.

I am not in the target group but would like to have the vaccination, what do I do?

We realise that concerned parents are very likely to approach GP practices and other providers to request private administration of the MenB vaccine. This is a parent's choice. However, GPs cannot administer vaccines that are supplied within the population vaccination programmes on a private basis to patients on their own practice lists if they are not part of the groups identified as eligible to receive these

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vaccines. This restriction is in place to safeguard both patients and professionals from potential conflicts of interest, particularly where there is insufficient evidence of the benefits or potential risks of providing the vaccines to these other patient groups.

We are aware that Men B vaccination is available through private immunisation clinics. However, it is not appropriate for NHS England to advise of or signpost to any private suppliers of these vaccines as we cannot assure that they are following the required standards for the safe storage, supply and administration of this vaccine and cannot therefore assure that any vaccines given will have been safely administered or will be effective. It is also not appropriate for NHSE or PHE to recommend these vaccines to be given outside of the JCVI recommendations as there is not sufficient evidence of the efficacy or cost effectiveness of doing so, and to do this would not be in line with evidence based practice.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease can include:

Meningitis	Septicaemia
Fever	Fever
Vomiting	Vomiting
Severe headache	Bruising / rash
Stiff neck	Rapid breathing
Dislike of bright light	Joint / muscle pain / difficulty weight bearing
Seizures	Cold hands and feet
Confusion / irritability	Confusion / irritability
Extreme sleepiness / difficulty waking	Extreme sleepiness / difficulty waking

We would encourage everyone, including students, to share awareness of meningitis and care for one another. Don't assume an illness is a hangover or a touch of flu. Learn the symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia and if you think a friend, housemate or family member is ill then check on them regularly and if you are worried seek medical help.

Where can I find more information on Meningitis?

More general information is available at:

- Meningitis Research Foundation web site www.meningitis.org
- Meningitis Now web site www.meningitisnow.org
- NHS choices web site

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- www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Meningitis/Pages/Symptoms.aspx
- PHE meningococcal disease web page
www.gov.uk/government/collections/meningococcal-disease-guidance-data-and-analysis
- Public Health England. *Guidance on the prevention and management of meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia in higher education institutions*: Public Health England, 2016 (7 November); 1-40
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/meningitis-and-septicaemia-prevention-and-management-in-higher-education-institutions>).