

## Meningitis Outbreak Update and Information

### Overview

As a result of the current outbreak of meningococcal disease (MenB) in Kent, there is an increased awareness of and attention on meningococcal disease cases and it is understandable that there may be concern from staff, parents and students.

DfE and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) are regularly updating education settings to help us understand what's happening, what actions (if any) we need to take, and what support is available.

Educational settings are advised to continue operating as usual. Meningococcal disease does not spread easily, and outbreaks of this size are rare. UKHSA will always contact settings directly when action is needed.

### Frequently asked questions

#### What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious but uncommon illness caused by meningococcal bacteria. It can lead to meningitis and sepsis. The onset can be sudden, which is why knowing the signs and symptoms, and acting quickly, is so important. There are multiple strains of meningococcal bacteria – MenA, MenB, MenC, MenW, MenX, MenY.

#### How is the disease spread?

Transmission of MenB requires close and prolonged contact to spread including living in the same household and intimate contact such as kissing or sharing drinks or vapes. The bacteria are not as contagious as other infections such as measles and COVID-19.

#### What are the symptoms?

Not all symptoms appear in every case, but symptoms to look out for include:

- a rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass
- sudden onset of high fever
- severe and worsening headache
- stiff neck
- vomiting and diarrhoea
- joint and muscle pain
- dislike of bright lights
- very cold hands and feet
- seizures
- confusion or delirium
- extreme sleepiness or difficulty waking

If you or someone you know develops these symptoms, seek medical help urgently by going to your nearest A&E or calling 999. If a friend goes to bed unwell, check on them regularly. Early treatment can be lifesaving.

You can also contact your GP or call NHS 111 if you are concerned, but do not wait – call 999 in an emergency.

#### Are UKHSA advising any education settings in Kent or the rest of England to close?

No. Schools, colleges, training providers and universities in Kent or elsewhere in England are not being advised to close, or partially close, or offer remote learning because of this outbreak.

If UKHSA identifies that a setting needs extra precautions, the local health protection team will contact that setting directly. If you have not been contacted, you can operate as normal.

#### What is the risk to the wider public?

The risk of infection to the wider population remains low but we are actively looking for contacts of people who have MenB (contact tracing) and offering preventative antibiotics to those in close contact with cases.

All of the cases identified to date are connected with Kent and there is no evidence currently that this outbreak has spread further. Individual MenB cases are not uncommon, but an outbreak of this size is unusual, and this is why additional measures are being taken to prevent the spread.

### **What should I do if a parent / carer reports their child as a possible case of meningococcal disease?**

If you hear directly from parents that their child has symptoms or is a possible case of meningococcal disease. If you need to contact UKHSA about a case of meningococcal disease, please enter your postcode here to find how to contact your local health protection team: [Find your local health protection team in England - GOV.UK](#)

In the event of any reports of suspected cases, principals must alert their advice link and report to health and safety via Smartlog without delay.

### **I have heard about a case of meningitis/meningococcal disease in our area. Should I write to parents to let them know?**

Hearing about cases locally can be concerning, but it does not necessarily mean a case has been confirmed as meningococcal disease linked to this outbreak. There are a lot of different viruses and bacteria (including meningococcal bacteria) that cause meningitis and sepsis type symptoms. In 2024/25, there were 378 cases of meningococcal disease reported in England. Cases of viral and bacterial meningitis will continue to occur in the community, as they currently do.

If a case of meningococcal disease or viral meningitis occurs in the community, UKHSA local health protection teams will advise on any action required, including communications to parents of children and young people in educational settings.

### **Have students in my setting been vaccinated against meningococcal disease?**

Several types of meningococcal bacteria can cause serious illness, which is why different vaccines have been developed to protect against them. In the UK, 2 main vaccines are used, MenACWY and MenB.

MenACWY protects against 4 types of meningococcal disease (group A, C, W, and Y) and MenB protects against meningococcal disease group B.

The MenB vaccine has been part of the NHS routine childhood schedule since July 2015. Most children who were born after 1 July 2015 will have been offered the MenB vaccine as part of the routine immunisation schedule when they were babies. This means that most children in primary schools and early years settings will have had the MenB vaccine. Outside of this programme children can only receive MenB vaccination privately. Older children will not have had MenB vaccination unless they have received it privately.

The MenB vaccine does not protect you against meningococcal disease group A, C, W or Y. The MenB vaccine does not prevent the bacteria from being carried and spread in the community, but it does protect you from becoming unwell.

Teenagers are routinely offered the MenACWY vaccine, in school years 9 and 10. The MenACWY vaccine does not protect you from MenB.

### **What is our process for managing infection diseases?**

The infection control procedure WTD is available [here](#).

Please get in touch directly with the health and safety team via TOPdesk for any other additional support or advice.

### **Further resources**

This blog post from UKHSA is being regularly updated in relation to the current outbreak:

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/18/meningitis-b-outbreak-what-you-need-to-know/>

Further information from DfE regarding education settings is available here:

[Information for education settings in England regarding the meningococcal disease outbreak - GOV.UK](#)

