

31 October 2018

Meningococcal case in south western Sydney

Meningococcal disease has been identified as the possible cause of death in a seven-year-old boy in south western Sydney, prompting renewed calls for parents to be vigilant of symptoms.

Public health director, Dr Naru Pal expressed the District's condolences to the child's family and said while the infection is rare, Meningococcal cases do tend to increase during spring.

"This is a tragic event and our sympathies are with the young boy's family at this very difficult time," Dr Pal said.

"Clearance antibiotics have been prescribed to close contacts to eradicate any meningococcal bacteria they may be carrying to prevent further transmission of the disease.

"Meningococcal disease can occur at any time of year, but we do typically see a peak in cases in spring, so we urge people to be aware of the symptoms and act fast".

Meningococcal infection does not spread easily. It is spread by secretions from the nose and throat of a person who is carrying the bacteria. Close and prolonged contact is needed to pass it on.

Meningococcal usually begins with the sudden onset of fever, often with headache, nausea and drowsiness. Neck stiffness, a dislike of bright lights and a rash of reddish-purple spots or bruises may develop rapidly. Babies with the infection may be irritable, not feed properly and have an abnormal cry.

There have been nine confirmed cases of meningococcal disease in the South Western Sydney Local Health District this year.

Since July 1, the Federal Government has expanded the protection offered to infants under the National Immunisation Program to include meningococcal A, W and Y disease, in addition to the meningococcal C protection that has been offered since 2003.

In addition, the NSW Government has funded meningococcal ACWY vaccine for older adolescents in schools since 2017 in response to an increase in cases of meningococcal W in recent years.

A single free meningococcal ACWY vaccine was offered to high school students in Years 11 and 12 in 2017 and Years 10 and 11 in 2018. Both Governments have announced funding to continue this program.

People aged 15 to 19 years who have not received the ACWY vaccine via the school program can visit their general practitioner to receive a free vaccine.

Information regarding meningococcal disease can be found on the NSW Health website http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Meningococcal_disease.aspx