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Parents and young people urged to know the symptoms of meningococcal

South Western Sydney Local Health District is urging parents and young people to know the symptoms and act fast if they suspect meningococcal disease to help prevent premature death or life-long disability.

As we head into late winter and early spring, infections tend to increase, and risk is greatest for children under five and for 15-24-year-olds.

Last year, there were 59 meningococcal cases in NSW and four in South Western Sydney Local Health District.

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

While it is a well-known symptom of meningococcal disease, the rash does not always occur, or may present late in the illness.

South Western Sydney Local Health District Director of Public Health Dr Naru Pal said seeking medical help urgently can be lifesaving.

“If you suspect meningococcal disease, don’t wait for the rash - see a doctor urgently,” Dr Pal said.

“While the number and severity of symptoms can vary, if you suspect meningococcal disease, you need to act fast because meningococcal disease can cause death or permanent disability within hours if not treated.”

Meningococcal disease can be fatal in up to one in 10 cases, and one in five infections result in permanent disabilities, including learning difficulties, sight and hearing problems, liver and kidney failure, loss of fingers, toes and limbs, or scarring caused by skin grafts.

“We strongly encourage vaccination as a key prevention against meningococcal disease,” Dr Pal said.

Under the National Immunisation Program, meningococcal ACWY (Men ACWY) vaccine is provided free for babies at 12 months, adolescents, and people of all ages with certain medical conditions. In NSW, the adolescent dose is delivered through the school vaccination program in Year 10.

As of 1 July 2020, Aboriginal children up to the age of two years, and people with certain medical conditions, can also access free meningococcal B (Men B) vaccine.

NSW Health is investing approximately \$140 million in its vaccination program in 2020-21.

For more information on vaccination please visit the NSW Health [website](#). For information on symptoms, transmission, risks and treatment, see the NSW Health [website](#).