

Antibiotics and MenB vaccination to be offered to young people in Dorset

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Antibiotics and MenB vaccination to be offered to young people in areas of Dorset following 3 cases of invasive meningococcal disease.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is working with Dorset Council, the NHS and local partners following 3 confirmed cases of meningococcal infection (meningitis) in young people in Weymouth, Dorset.

The cases were confirmed between 20 March and 15 April. All have received treatment and are recovering well. Close contacts of the cases have already been offered antibiotics as a precaution.

Two of the cases attend Budmouth Academy and the other attends Wey Valley Academy. Further information about the signs and symptoms of meningitis has been shared with students and parents of both schools.

Around 300 to 400 cases of meningococcal disease are diagnosed in England every year. These 3 cases have been confirmed as Meningitis B (MenB) and are the same sub-strain type, but a different sub-strain to the one detected recently in Kent.

The 2 cases who attend Budmouth Academy are contacts of each other, but currently no confirmed epidemiological link has been made between these cases and the third individual who attends Wey Valley Academy. This may mean that this strain of MenB bacteria is transmitting more widely among young people in Weymouth. Due to this, and as an additional precautionary measure, antibiotics and MenB vaccination will now be offered to young people currently in school years 7 to 13 across the Weymouth, Portland and Chickerell areas of Dorset.

Dr Beth Smout, UKHSA Deputy Director said:

We are working closely with partners to follow up and offer precautionary antibiotics to close contacts of the cases. However, meningococcal disease does not spread easily, and outbreaks like we have seen recently in Kent are rare. These cases are not linked to the Kent outbreak and it is important to be aware that this outbreak is not on the same scale as we saw in Kent in terms of speed of transmission or severity.

However, it is possible that we will see further cases linked to these latest cases in Weymouth and we understand that there will be concern among students, staff, parents and the local community as we widen our offer of antibiotics and vaccination. I'd like to stress that this is an additional precaution, and that we're following national guidelines to reduce the risk of the infection spreading. School pupils and staff should attend school as normal if they remain well.

UKHSA is now recommending a single dose of antibiotics and a meningitis B vaccine be offered to young people who live or go to school in the Weymouth area, as follows:

- anyone who is a resident in Weymouth or Portland or Chickereall and is in current school years 7 to 13 (or equivalent), or anyone not in full time education who would be in one of these year groups
- anyone who attends an educational setting in the Weymouth, Portland or Chickereall area and is in current school years 7 to 13 (or equivalent).

This will be offered in stages starting with Budmouth Academy and Wey Valley schools, as the cases attend these settings. Pupils that attend other schools and other eligible children in Weymouth who do not attend school will be invited after the weekend.

Young people under 16 should be accompanied by a parent or guardian who is able to provide consent at the time.

More information on the vaccination schedule will be provided in due course.

Dr Smout added:

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly, so it's essential that everyone is alert to the signs and symptoms of meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia, which can include a fever, headache, rapid breathing, drowsiness, shivering, vomiting and cold hands and feet. Septicaemia can also cause a characteristic rash that does not fade when pressed against a glass. If the disease is suspected, you should seek immediate medical attention as the disease can progress rapidly.

It's also important for teenagers to ensure they take up the MenACWY vaccine routinely offered by the NHS – but also to be aware that this vaccine does not protect against Men B, which is why knowing the symptoms and seeking early treatment is so important.

Young people in school years 7 to 13 in Weymouth are strongly encouraged to take up the offer of antibiotics and MenB vaccination and we are grateful to all those involved in our investigations so far for assisting us.

UKHSA and Dorset Council have issued advice to staff, parents and carers at all educational settings in the area.

Anyone who becomes unwell with symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia should seek medical help urgently at the closest Accident and Emergency Department or by dialling 999. Early treatment can be lifesaving. If you're not sure if your symptoms are serious, use NHS 111 online or call 111 for further advice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/antibiotics-and-menb-vaccination-to-be-offered-to-young-people-in-dorset>