

Cases of invasive meningococcal disease confirmed in Kent

16.3.2026 - Trish Mannes | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Statement issued by the UK Health Security Agency on 15 March 2026.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and NHS are arranging antibiotics for some students in the Canterbury area of Kent following a number of cases of invasive meningococcal disease. The specific strain has not been identified at the present time.

From 13 to 15 March 2026, 13 cases were notified with signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia to UKHSA. Sadly, 2 people are known to have died.

UKHSA and the University of Kent are issuing advice to staff and students. Specialists at UKHSA are interviewing affected individuals and their families to help identify all close contacts and arrange antibiotics to limit spread.

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.

Trish Mannes, UKHSA Regional Deputy Director for the South East, said:

We understand that many people at the university and in the wider community will be affected by this sad news and we would like to offer our condolences to the friends and family involved.

Students and staff will understandably be feeling worried about the risk of further cases; however, we would like to reassure them that close contacts of cases have been given antibiotics as a precautionary measure. Advice and support is being offered to the wider student community, and to local hospitals and NHS 111, and we're monitoring the situation closely.

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly, so it's essential that students and staff are 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.

Students are particularly at risk of missing the early warning signs of meningitis because they can be easily confused with other illnesses such as a bad cold, flu or even a hangover. That's why it's vital that, if a friend goes to bed unwell, you check on them regularly and don't hesitate to seek medical help by contacting their GP or calling NHS 111 if they have these symptoms or you're concerned about them. This could save their life.

Background

Meningococcal disease (meningitis and septicaemia) is an uncommon but serious disease caused by meningococcal bacteria. Very occasionally, the meningococcal bacteria can cause serious illness, (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning), which can rapidly lead to sepsis.

The onset of illness is often sudden and early diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics are vital.

Early symptoms, which may not always be present, include:

- a rash that doesn't 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/delirium
- extreme sleepiness/difficulty waking

Young people going on to university or college for the first time are particularly at risk of meningitis because they mix with so many other students, some of whom are unknowingly carrying the bacteria at the back of their nose and throat.

There are numerous strains of the meningococcal infection. The MenACWY vaccination gives good protection against MenA, MenC, MenW, and MenY. It is routinely offered to teenagers in school Years 9 and 10. However, this vaccine does not protect against all forms of meningitis. Other strains such as MenB can circulate in young adults, which is why it's important to know how to spot the symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia as early detection and treatment can save lives.

Further information on meningococcal disease

- Meningitis - NHS
- The Meningitis Research Foundation
0808 800 3344 (24 hours)
- Meningitis Now
0808 80 10 388 (9am to 8pm)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cases-of-invasive-meningococcal-disease-confirmed-in-kent>