



19th March 2026

Information for Parents and Carers from the UKHSA and DfE

We are writing to update you on the current distressing outbreak of invasive meningococcal disease in Kent, and to reassure you about the low level of risk in your child or children's education setting.

About invasive meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease (meningitis and septicaemia) is an uncommon but serious disease caused by meningococcal bacteria. The onset of illness is often sudden and early diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics are vital. While meningococcal disease can affect all ages, recent outbreaks have shown that **older children, teenagers and young adults** are more likely to be affected.

How invasive meningococcal disease spreads

Meningococcal infection doesn't spread very easily. The bacteria can only be passed to others through prolonged, close contact such as living in the same household.

People may be offered preventive antibiotics if they have had significant, close contact with someone with meningococcal disease in the last 7 days.

What UK Health Security Agency is doing

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is leading a multi-agency management team to respond to this outbreak. Specialists at UKHSA are interviewing affected individuals and their families to help identify all close contacts and arrange antibiotics to limit spread. Any close contacts identified in early years or other educational settings will be followed up by the local UKHSA health protection team.

If you have not been contacted directly by UKHSA, the risk to you and your children is very low.

What you need to do

It is always important for parents and carers to make sure that children stay up to date with all their routine vaccinations, as these offer important protection against infectious disease outbreaks.

Parents and carers should also be aware and alert to the signs and symptoms of invasive meningococcal disease.

Signs and symptoms

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly, so it's essential that parents and carers are alert to the signs and symptoms of meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia. You should seek urgent medical help if you or your child develop any symptoms of meningococcal disease.

- 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

Vaccination

There are several types of meningococcal bacteria that can cause meningitis. The current outbreak is caused by Meningococcal B (MenB). The MenB vaccine has been offered in the UK as part of the NHS vaccination schedule to young babies since 2015 (all children in year 5 and below) and has been shown to be effective. This means many children in primary school have already been vaccinated against MenB.

It is important to make sure that children stay up to date with all their routine vaccinations, as these offer vital protection.

The Meningitis Research Foundation

www.meningitis.org

Helpline UK 080 8800 3344

Meningitis Now

www.meningitisnow.org

Helpline 0808 80 10 388

or helpline@meningitisnow.org