

From
Kate Harvey
Director of Public Health
County Hall, High Street, Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1UD

Tel (01983) 821000
Fax (01983) 520563
Email Kate.Harvey@iow.gov.uk
DX 56361 Newport (Isle of Wight)
Web www.iow.gov.uk

Our Ref: KH/MO1

20th March 2026

Dear School Leaders,

Re: Meningitis outbreak in Kent

Following the recent cases of meningitis in Kent and the very sad news of the deaths of two young people, we are writing to share general information that may be helpful to respond to any questions that may arise within your school community.

We want to reassure you, there are **no cases on the Isle of Wight**, and the risk to children, staff and families locally remains **very low**. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is closely monitoring the situation, and we have shared their recommended resources overleaf as they contain helpful information and updates.

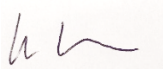
Meningococcal disease is a serious but uncommon illness caused by meningococcal bacteria. Meningococcal infection does not spread like viruses such as colds and flu; it requires close, direct, or prolonged contact.

Most cases of meningococcal disease are unrelated to outbreaks and occur spontaneously linked to the fact that a small proportion of the population carry meningococcal bacteria in their nose and throats without becoming unwell.

It is helpful for people to know the main **signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease/meningitis**, outlined below, as rapid recognition and treatment can protect lives.

We hope this information is useful and helps you respond to any questions that may arise.

Yours faithfully



Kate Harvey FFPH
Director of Public Health

What is Meningitis?

Meningococcal disease (meningitis and septicaemia) is an uncommon but serious illness. It can lead to meningitis which is an inflammation of the lining of the brain and sepsis (blood poisoning). The onset can be sudden, which is why knowing the signs and symptoms, and acting quickly, is so important.

Bacterial meningitis, as in the outbreak in Kent, can lead to blood poisoning (septicaemia) and can affect the brain. This outbreak is linked to the MenB strain.

How is it spread?

Meningococcal infection doesn't spread very easily. It is usually spread through close, prolonged contact. Some people can carry the bacteria in their nose or throat without getting ill themselves, but they can unknowingly spread it to others through spit/saliva, coughs, sneezing, kissing and sharing utensils. It is not as contagious as other infections such as measles or COVID-19.

What to look for?

It is important to recognise the symptoms of meningitis or septicaemia as early as possible to receive treatment. Some of these symptoms can look like a common cold or flu. However, people with meningitis or septicaemia can become ill very quickly, and it is important to keep checking on someone who is unwell. Symptoms can include all or only some of the following:

- High temperature (fever) over 37.5C (99.5F)
- Vomiting (being sick) and diarrhoea
- Very bad headache
- Rash that does not fade when pressed with glass – do the [glass test](#)
- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- Severe sleepiness, losing consciousness
- Very cold hands and feet
- Extreme sleepiness or difficulty waking
- Confusion/delirium
- Seizures (fits)

If you believe someone in your care could have meningitis or septicaemia, call 999 or seek urgent medical help. Early treatment can be lifesaving.

Where to find out more about meningitis

There are several reliable resources available online to find out more about meningitis, how it is spread and the signs and symptoms to look out for. These may be useful to share with families who are seeking reliable guidance.

- UKHSA: [What is meningitis? Symptoms, risks and how to protect yourself – UK Health Security Agency](#)
- UKHSA: [Meningitis B outbreak: what you need to know – UK Health Security Agency](#)
- Meningitis - [NHS](#)
- [The Meningitis Research Foundation](#) - 0808 800 3344 (24 hours)
- [Meningitis Now](#) - 0808 80 10 388 (9am to 8pm) or their helpline email at helpline@meningitisnow.org
- NHS Inform: [Meningitis | NHS inform](#)
- [Meningitis: signs and symptoms leaflet and poster - GOV.UK](#)
- [MenACWY vaccine: information for young people](#)
- [Who is eligible for the MenB vaccine and do I need it myself? – UK Health Security Agency](#)

With general information health information, the [Healthier Together](#) app is also a useful source of information for parents and carers more generally. The app provides parents and carers with information to help keep their child safe and healthy, as well as helping them decide what to do when their child is unwell.