

## Meningitis Information for Patients

We understand there is increased concern across our community due to the outbreak of Meningitis B in Kent.

### What is MenB?

Meningococcal group B (MenB) is a rare but serious bacterial infection that can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and/or sepsis (blood poisoning).

### Who does it usually affect?

MenB most commonly affects:

- Babies and young children under 5
- Teenagers and young adults

However, it can occur at any age.

### How is it spread?

The bacteria are spread through close, prolonged contact with respiratory secretions (e.g. coughing, kissing, or sharing utensils). It is **not easily spread through casual contact**.

### Vaccination – who has had it?

- The MenB vaccine is part of the **routine UK childhood immunisation programme**. The vaccine programme in the UK started in 2015 so people born before this would not have received the vaccine routinely.
- It is routinely given to infants at:
  - 8 weeks
  - 16 weeks
  - 1 year

Some older children or young people may also have received it depending on eligibility at the time. (Such as patients without a spleen).

### Who is eligible now?

- Babies as part of the routine schedule
- Individuals identified as being at increased risk (e.g. certain medical conditions)

### Who is not routinely eligible?

- Older children, teenagers, and adults who are not in an at-risk group are **not routinely offered the MenB vaccine on the NHS**.

### **Can I get vaccinated privately?**

Yes. Some pharmacies and private clinics offer the MenB vaccine on a private basis. Availability and cost will vary. The Wall House cannot advise on which private services to use.

### **Important – NHS and immunity status**

The NHS does **not routinely check individual immunity status** for meningitis. Vaccination is offered based on national eligibility criteria rather than blood testing.

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### **Symptoms to watch for**

Meningitis and sepsis can develop quickly. Early symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Muscle pain
- Cold hands and feet

More serious symptoms include:

- Neck stiffness
- Sensitivity to light
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Seizures
- A rash that does not fade when pressed (late sign)

Please note the rash **DOES NOT ALWAYS OCCUR** and **can look different in black or brown skin**. A vasculitis rash associated with meningitis (often meningococcal septicaemia) presents as a rapid, life-threatening progression of skin lesions. On black or brown skin, this rash can be harder to detect, making vigilance crucial. The rash often appears as **dark purple, brown, or bruise-like spots** that do not fade under pressure.

#### **Appearance on Black or Brown Skin**

- **Coloration:** Instead of bright red, the spots may appear darker than the surrounding skin—deep purple, brown, or black.
- **Initial Appearance:** It may start as tiny, faint pinprick spots (petechiae) or spots that look like flea bites or scratches.
- **Progression:** The spots rapidly grow into larger, bruise-like blotches (purpura).
- **Key Locations:** The rash is more easily seen on paler areas, including the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, the abdomen, the roof of the mouth, or inside the eyelids.

- **The "Glass Test" (Non-blanching)**
- A defining feature of this vasculitis rash is that it is **non-blanching**, meaning the spots do not fade or turn white when a clear glass is pressed against them.
- **Caution:** Because the rash can be subtle on dark skin, a "glass test" should still be performed on any mysterious spots or discoloured areas, particularly if fever is present.

In babies and young children:

- Floppy or unresponsive
- High-pitched cry
- Refusing feeds
- Bulging soft spot (fontanelle)

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### **When to seek help**

- **Call 999 or go to A&E immediately** if someone is seriously unwell, difficult to wake, has a rash that does not fade, or you are very concerned.
- Contact **NHS 111** or your GP for urgent advice if symptoms are concerning but not severe.

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We are experiencing increased demand at present and appreciate your patience. Please be reassured that meningitis remains **rare**, but it is important to seek urgent medical help if you are worried.

**The Wall House Surgery**