

# Meningococcal Disease

## UPDATE NSW

8 OCTOBER 2007

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### Update

In September 2007, there were 10 people notified in NSW with meningococcal disease and 1 death. In total, 80 people have been notified in NSW for 2007, including 3 deaths (see table for details).

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### Background

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness that usually manifests as meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and septicaemia (blood poisoning). The disease is rare and now usually affects approximately 100 people in NSW each year. Meningococcal disease occurs more commonly in winter and early spring.

While anybody can get the disease, those at increased risk include:

- infants, young children, adolescents and young adults
- household-like contacts of a case
- people exposed to smokers
- people who live in crowded households
- people with a recent upper respiratory tract infection
- people who practice intimate kissing with multiple partners.

Infection with bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis* causes meningococcal disease. In previous years, in NSW, serogroup B meningococcal bacteria have been responsible for about half of the cases of meningococcal disease and serogroup C is for about one third.

Early symptoms may include leg pain, abnormal skin colour and cold hands and feet. Later symptoms may include fever, vomiting, drowsiness, confusion, headache, neck stiffness, a dislike of bright lights, and a blotchy red rash that may change quickly. Not all of the symptoms of meningococcal disease may be present. Babies and very young children may have less specific symptoms such as refusing feeds, irritability and a high-pitched cry.

A fact sheet on meningococcal disease can be found at:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/factsheet/pdf/meningococcal.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/factsheet/pdf/meningococcal.pdf)

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### Methods

Meningococcal disease is a notifiable disease in NSW. Hospitals and laboratories are required to notify their local public health unit as soon as a provisional diagnosis of meningococcal disease is made. Cases are recorded onto the notifiable diseases database for NSW.

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### Findings

As of 30 September 2007, 80 cases of meningococcal disease were notified in NSW for 2007 including 3 deaths.

Of these 80 cases:

- approximately two-thirds were caused by serogroup B, one tenth were caused by serogroup C and one quarter were caused by other or unknown serogroups
- slightly more than half were male
- the most common age group affected was aged between 0 and 4 years followed by those aged between 15 and 24 years (see table).

Over a quarter of the cases that have occurred in NSW this year were reported in August.

# Meningococcal Disease in NSW

**Table**

**Characteristics of meningococcal cases 2005–2007**

Case characteristics	September 2007		1 Jan–30 Sept 2007		1 Jan–30 Sept 2006		Total 2006		Total 2005	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Total</b>	10	100	80	100	85	100	104	100	134	100
<b>Serogroup</b>										
B	8	80	50	63	43	51	53	51	73	54
C	1	10	9	11	11	13	14	13	15	11
Other/unknown	1	10	21	26	31	36	37	36	46	34
<b>Gender</b>										
Male	5	50	42	53	37	44	46	44	71	53
Female	5	50	38	48	48	56	58	56	63	47
<b>Age group</b>										
0–4	8	80	33	41	26	31	32	31	41	31
5–14	0	0	7	9	11	13	11	11	16	12
15–24	2	20	17	21	19	22	26	25	33	25
25–44	0	0	9	11	16	19	18	17	24	18
>45	0	0	14	18	13	15	17	16	20	15
<b>Residence</b>										
Sydney area	5	50	52	65	54	64	65	63	80	60
Other	5	50	28	35	31	36	39	37	54	40
<b>Deaths</b>	1	10	3	4	5	6	6	6	8	6

**Explanatory notes:**

- Data may change from week to week due to delays in reporting.
- Data is based on date of onset and excludes cases of meningococcal conjunctivitis.
- Serogrouping of cases may change from unknown to a serogroup as laboratory results become available.
- Other serogroups include A, W135 and Y.
- Sydney area covers the Northern Sydney region of Northern Sydney/Central Coast Area Health Service (AHS), the South Eastern Sydney region of South Eastern Sydney/Illawarra AHS, Sydney South West AHS and Sydney West AHS

**Chart**

**Quarterly notifications of meningococcal disease in NSW, 2000 to September 2007**

