

Communicable Diseases Weekly Report

Week 32, 2 August to 8 August 2020

In summary, we report:

- [Invasive meningococcal disease \(IMD\)](#) – one new case and annual campaign launch
- [Novel coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

*Please note there is no table of NSW notifiable conditions data included in this week's report due to a current technical problem with notifiable disease data reporting.

For further information see NSW Health [infectious diseases page](#). This includes links to other NSW Health [infectious disease surveillance reports](#) and a [diseases data page](#) for a range of notifiable infectious diseases.

Invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)

One new case of invasive meningococcal disease was notified in this reporting week in an Aboriginal person from a regional area of NSW. Testing has identified that the infection was caused by meningococcal serogroup B.

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but serious and often fatal infection caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. There are several serogroups of meningococcal bacteria associated with IMD, of which four (B, C, W and Y) cause almost all IMD in Australia.

Cases of meningococcal disease occur year-round but tend to increase in late winter and early spring. While meningococcal disease can affect people of any age, children less than 5 years and people 15-24 years of age are at highest risk of meningococcal disease.

The annual NSW Health Meningococcal Disease Awareness campaign begins this week to bring awareness of the symptoms of meningococcal disease and the need for people to seek urgent medical attention should symptoms occur. For the second year, the campaign is using social media platforms, including Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram to assist parents and young people to identify the symptoms of meningococcal disease so they can act fast if symptoms begin (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Examples from the NSW 2020 Meningococcal Disease Awareness Campaign



The initial symptoms of IMD are non-specific and often mimic other illnesses such as respiratory or gastrointestinal infections, making diagnosis difficult. Symptoms may include sudden fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headache, neck stiffness, dislike of bright lights, joint pain, irritability, and a red-purple rash that doesn't disappear when pressure is applied. While considered characteristic of meningococcal disease the rash does not always occur or may present late in the illness.

In young children, symptoms may also include irritability, difficulty waking up, high-pitched crying, rapid or laboured breathing and refusal to eat.

People with IMD can become very unwell very quickly, and the disease can be fatal within hours of the first symptom appearing. Anyone who thinks they, or someone they care for, might be experiencing symptoms of meningococcal disease, should seek urgent medical care. An absence of a rash should not exclude the consideration of meningococcal disease. Patients presenting with non-specific symptoms should be encouraged to return to the doctor or visit an emergency department if symptoms persist or rapidly worsen.

The National Immunisation Program (NIP) provides meningococcal ACWY vaccine to babies at 12 months, adolescents, and people of all ages with asplenia, hyposplenia, complement deficiency, and people being treated with eculizumab. In NSW, the adolescent dose is delivered through the school vaccination program in Year 10. People aged 14-19 years who are not enrolled in school, or who miss out on the school vaccination can access free vaccine from their GP.

Meningococcal B vaccine is provided free under the NIP for Aboriginal infants and people with asplenia, hyposplenia, complement deficiency, and people being treated with eculizumab. Doses for Aboriginal infants are delivered at 6 weeks, 4 months, and 12 months of age. Catch up vaccine is available for Aboriginal children under 2 years of age until 30/06/2023 (dose number is dependent on age at administration).

For those not covered by the NIP, meningococcal vaccines can be purchased via private prescription via General Practitioners.

Further information

- NSW Health [meningococcal disease website](#) and [meningococcal disease factsheet](#)
- [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) for more information on meningococcal vaccines
- [NSW meningococcal disease data](#).

Novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)

For up-to-date information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak and the NSW response, please visit the [NSW Health COVID-19 page](#).

Summary of notifiable conditions activity in NSW

Please note that there is no table of NSW notifiable conditions data included in this week's CDWR, due to the fact that we are currently experiencing a technical problem with notifiable disease data reporting which is affecting all diseases and all time periods.