

19 May 2026



Public Health and Wellbeing  
West Berkshire District Council  
Council Offices  
Market Street  
Newbury  
RG14 5LD

## **Dear Parents and Guardians**

You may be aware of three local cases of invasive meningococcal disease (meningitis) amongst young people in the Reading area including, very sadly, one death. You may have also heard of an additional case of invasive meningococcal disease (meningitis) involving a young person in West Berkshire.

I understand that parents, guardians, and students may feel concerned following this news. I would therefore like to provide the information below for reassurance and awareness.

Please be assured that the risk to others in the wider local community remains very low. The situation continues to be closely monitored and reviewed. The latest case is linked to the existing group of cases already being managed and does not change the current assessment of risk. There is no need to make any changes to normal school routines, and there is no reason for pupils to be kept at home unless they become unwell.

We are working closely with expert public health teams at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to monitor the situation and ensure that any appropriate public health actions are taken.

### **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 people of all ages, older children, teenagers, and young adults, particularly those in shared settings such as schools, colleges, and universities, can be more likely to be affected.

### **How invasive meningococcal disease spreads**

Meningococcal infection does not spread easily. The bacteria are usually passed on only through prolonged close contact, for example living in the same household, prolonged kissing, or sharing items such as vapes.

Where necessary, close contacts identified as being at increased risk may be offered preventative antibiotics following public health assessment.

### **What you need to do**

Although meningococcal disease is uncommon and the local risk remains very low, it is important that parents and pupils are aware of the signs and symptoms. Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly, so it is important to seek urgent medical attention if you or your child develops symptoms.

### **Signs and symptoms**

- A rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass
- Sudden onset of high fever
- Severe or worsening headache
- Stiff neck
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Joint and muscle pain
- Dislike of bright lights
- Very cold hands and feet

- Seizures
- Confusion or delirium
- Extreme sleepiness or difficulty waking

Call 999 or attend your nearest Accident & Emergency department immediately if you suspect meningitis or sepsis in someone you look after or yourself. If you are unsure, Use [NHS 111 online](#) or by telephone for advice if you're not sure if it's anything serious. You can find out more information about meningitis and where to seek help and advice at [Meningitis - Symptoms - NHS](#). And this Blog from UKHSA: [What is meningitis? Symptoms, risks and how to protect yourself – UK Health Security Agency](#)

## **Vaccination**

As a precautionary measure, targeted MenB vaccination may be offered to a small number of individuals identified through the public health contact tracing process as being at increased risk. Currently, wider vaccination is not recommended.

The best way to protect your child's health is with free NHS vaccines (injections). The vaccines don't protect from all types (strains) of this bacteria. The NHS offers two main meningococcal vaccines: MenB and MenACWY

- The MenB vaccine protects against meningococcal group B and is given routinely to babies at 8 weeks, 12 weeks, and a booster at 1 year. Babies born on or after the 1st of May 2015 are offered this vaccine on the NHS. Catch-up is limited, as children who miss doses can usually only receive them up to the age of 2, with no routine NHS programme for older children or teenagers. Teenagers in the UK are not routinely offered the MenB vaccine because the programme is focused on protecting babies, who are at highest risk. [Men B vaccine factsheet](#). Men B vaccine factsheet. There are different types of Men B vaccine which protect against slightly different strains of Men B disease.
- The MenACWY vaccine protects against meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y and is routinely offered to teenagers in school (typically in years 9–10, around age 13–15) as a single dose. A broader catch-up programme is available for those

who missed the vaccine, allowing vaccination up to the age of 25, with particular emphasis on young adults entering university who may be at higher risk. [Men ACWY vaccine factsheet](#).

Parents who are unsure whether their child is up to date with vaccinations are encouraged to:

- Check their child's Red Book (personal child health record)
- Contact their GP surgery

I hope you find this information helpful and reassuring. For further information about meningitis, please visit the NHS website at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis/> or access support from the charities listed below, both of which provide free information, advice, and helpline services:

**The Meningitis Research Foundation**

[www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org)

**Helpline UK** 080 8800 3344

**Meningitis Now**

[www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org)

**Helpline** 0808 80 10 388

or [helpline@meningitisnow.org](mailto:helpline@meningitisnow.org)

Yours sincerely,



Matt Pearce

Director of Public Health

Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire Council