27 November 2018

Dear PHUs / MOsH

Targeted meningococcal vaccination programme for Northland

On 26 November 2018 the Minister of Health has announced a decision to implement a meningococcal vaccination programme in Northland using the Menactra vaccine. A copy of the media release is attached.

In addition, the MoH is updating its advice on first line antibiotics use for suspect meningococcal disease and this will be made available in the next few days.

Please continue to respond to any meningococcal disease notifications as per the Communicable disease manual. PHARMAC have also confirmed that both Bexsero (Meningococcal B vaccine) and Menactra (Meningococcal ACYW vaccine) are funded for close contacts of cases.

The MoH is closely monitoring meningococcal disease notifications across NZ and liaising closely with both ESR and PHARMAC on this. We are also developing a high level communications plan. Please do continue to contact us if you have any concerns or comments.

Kind regards

Caroline McElnoy
Director of Public Health
Population Health and Prevention
Targeted meningococcal vaccination programme for Northland

Health Minister Dr David Clark has announced the launch of a targeted vaccination programme in Northland to control an outbreak of meningococcal disease.

"There has been a marked increase this year in the number of people who have contracted group W meningococcal disease (MenW), with Northland being particularly hard hit.

"This MenW strain has a high mortality rate and tragically has killed three people in Northland this year. So far 27 people have contracted MenW nationwide in 2018 (more than twice as many as in 2017), including seven in Northland.
"The advice from clinical experts is that MenW has reached outbreak levels in Northland and we should urgently launch an immunisation programme to prevent further spread of the disease.

"There is strong international demand for the MenW vaccine, which is in short supply. Pharmac and the Ministry of Health have done well to source 20,000 doses covering four types of meningococcal disease, including A, C, W and Y. The first batch of 10,000 doses will arrive in New Zealand next week and the remainder a few weeks later.

"This means we can begin targeted vaccinations next month. The vaccination programme will target Northland residents who are aged 9 months to under-5, and those aged 13 to under 20 years.

"Research shows that vaccinating these two age groups is the best way to reduce the spread of meningococcal disease in the entire Northland community. This helps to protect everybody, even if they don't qualify for the free vaccination.

"Pharmac and the Ministry of Health will continue to try to source further doses of the vaccine as a contingency, in case further roll-out of the programme is recommended.

"Northland District Health Board plans to start a three-week community vaccination programme on 5 December in selected high schools across Northland.

"Launching a vaccination programme now, when the school year is almost over and the holiday season is close, will be challenging for the DHB. However it is important that we begin this work as soon as possible to contain this deadly disease in Northland," David Clark says.