Date: 2 November 2018
To: William Rainger, Director, Population Health and Prevention
From: Laurence Holding, Manager, Communicable Diseases
CC: Sarah Reader, Manager, Public Health Group
Caroline McElnay, Director, Public Health
Subject: Briefing: Meningococcal W in Northland
For your: Noting

Summary
There has been a significant increase in group W meningococcal disease in New Zealand since the second half of 2017, and the Northland population has been most affected by this.

The Ministry is developing an action plan which will include a communication strategy and establishment of a TAG to develop possible response options and recommendations. One of the first actions is to publish a media release aimed at the general public to inform them of the signs, symptoms and risks of potential meningococcal disease and to provide advice around seeking medical urgent treatment. A draft of the media release is attached.

Background
There has been a steady increase in the number of meningococcal cases since 2014.
2014 – 46 cases
2015 – 64 cases
2016 – 75 cases
2017 – 112 cases

Group B has remained the most prevalent group, however, there has been a sharp increase in group W meningococcal disease in NZ since the second half of 2017. Prior to 2017, there used to be zero to six cases a year. In 2017, 12 cases were reported including three deaths, and 2018 (as of 1 November) there has been 24 reported cases, including four deaths.

Northland’s population has been the most affected, with seven cases of group W meningococcal disease reported in 2018, including three deaths. Northland has had four reported cases in September and October.

Similar increases of group W meningococcal disease have been seen in other countries, including the UK and Australia. The particular strain of group W meningococcal disease causing this spread is associated with a high mortality and affects all age groups.

The rate of group W meningococcal disease in the Northland population for all ethnicities under 15 years is now 8.1 per 100,000 population, and the rate for Māori under 15 years is 22.7 cases per 100,000 population. This rate defines the population at risk and meets the definition for a community outbreak as set out in the Communicable Disease Control Manual. See: https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/communicable-disease-control-manual/neisseria-meningitidis-invasive-disease.
Actions
The Ministry has developed an action plan for addressing the community outbreak of group W meningococcal disease in Northland. Proposed immediate actions include:

- a media release to go out Monday 5 November highlighting the increased rates of meningococcal disease, the risks associated with the disease, the signs and symptoms of meningococcal and advice on seeking urgent medical treatment. A draft of this release is attached
- communications to go out Monday 5 November to all general practitioners and emergency department health care professionals advising on the increasing rates of meningococcal disease, in particular the group W strain, and increasing awareness of the high case fatality rate associated with group W meningococcal disease and the atypical presentation of the disease
- the formation of a technical advisory group (TAG), which is expected to meet during the week of 5 November to generate advice and recommendations on the most effective and cost-effective intervention strategies to address the community outbreak in Northland.

The Ministry is working closely with Northland DHB, who are managing the response locally.

Requests
It is requested that you:

| 1.   | Note | There has been a significant increase in group W meningococcal disease in New Zealand since the second half of 2017, and the Northland population has been most affected by this. | Yes/No |
| 2.   | Note | The Ministry is developing an action plan which will include a communication strategy and establishment of a TAG to develop possible response options and recommendations. | Yes/No |
| 3.   | Note | The draft media release attached. | Yes/No |

Signature: 
Laurence Holding 
Manager, Communicable Diseases

Date: 2/11/18

Signature: 
Caroline McElvay 
Director, Public Health

Date: 2/11/18

Signature: 
William Rainger 
Director, Population Health and Prevention

Date: 5/11/15
Media Release

New advisory group to address meningococcal disease

Date: 5 November 2018

A Technical Advisory Group will be established this week to urgently start working with local health services on ways to reduce meningococcal disease rates after an outbreak in Northland.

The Ministry's Director of Public Health, Dr Caroline McElnay, said the annual number of cases had steadily increased since 2014 where 46 cases were reported.

"There were a total of 112 cases of meningococcal disease last year and the number is likely to be even higher this year with 94 cases to date".

"While Group B has remained the most prevalent type, it is concerning that there has been a sharp increase in cases of group W meningococcal disease (MenW) in New Zealand since the second semester of 2017, with 12 cases reported in the whole year of 2017, including 3 deaths, and 24 cases this year by 1 November, including four deaths. Typically, there are zero to six cases per year in New Zealand.

"This MenW strain is associated with high mortality rates and Northland has been the worst affected, with seven cases this year, including three deaths. There have been four cases reported in September and October," Dr McElnay said.

"I want to express my deepest condolences on behalf of the Ministry of Health to those who have lost loved ones to this dangerous disease".

"We have decided to establish this Technical Advisory Group, which will start working this week with local public health experts to develop strategies to address Northland's outbreak and the growing number of meningococcal disease cases nationwide. Similar increases of MenW cases have also been reported overseas, including in Australia and the United Kingdom.

"We are keen to encourage everyone to familiarise themselves with the symptoms of this potentially fatal disease because quick action can help to save lives."
"Meningococcal disease can progress very quickly and may initially appear as a flu-like illness. It can be difficult to diagnose because it can look like other illnesses," Dr McElnay said.

See here for more information on Meningococcal disease, including its symptoms, treatment and prevention.

**Media contact**
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