

TEHAMA COUNTY HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY



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DATE: January 10, 2010
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Suspected Case of Meningococcal Disease

A student at Bidwell School in Red Bluff became ill this week with suspected meningococcal infection and has subsequently died, according to Tehama County Health Officer, Dr. Richard Wickenheiser. “We would like to convey our deepest sympathy to the family of this boy, Dr. Wickenheiser said. “His death is a tragic reminder of the threat posed by this disease.”

William McCoy, Superintendent for Red Bluff Elementary School District says, “In addition to our thoughts going out to the family, we are doing all that we can to work with our partners in Public Health to ensure that our remaining students and staff are safe.”

The Tehama County Department of Education is working closely with state and local health officials to prevent the spread of this disease. All persons who had close contact with the ten-year-old victim have been identified and have already been treated with antibiotics by Public Health and school nurses. Though the risk of contracting the disease is low for those who did not have close contact with the patient, Public Health and Tehama County Department of Education are planning meningitis clinics at local schools to minimize the likelihood of the disease spreading. Red Bluff schools will contact parents with information about the dates, times and locations of these clinics.

Larry Champion, Tehama County Superintendent of Schools states that, “ We are dealing with both grieving for the student we lost and making sure that no other student becomes ill. The health and safety of our students and staff is always our first priority. We are working closely with our partners in Public Health to ensure that every precaution is taken to protect students, staff, the educational community and all Tehama County residents.”

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What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by *Neisseria meningitides* bacteria. The two most common types of meningococcal disease are: 1) meningitis, when the bacteria infect the fluid and the covering of a person's spinal core and brain, and 2) meningococemia, an infection of the bloodstream which leads to bleeding under the skin.

Am I or my child at increased risk for meningococcal disease?

You are at increased risk if you are a close contact of someone with meningococcal disease. Close contact means living with or having intimate contact with this person. People in the same household and persons working in the same setting as the patient are considered close contacts. Close contacts can also include anyone who shared oral secretions, such as kissing or sharing foods, drinks, water bottles, cigarettes, lipstick, etc. ***Remember: Close contacts of the current case have already been contacted and treated.*** For all other persons, including those who had casual contact with the boy such as would occur in most school-related activities, the risk of infections is extraordinarily low and approaches that of the population at large. For them, antibiotic prophylaxis is NOT indicated and is not advised.

What are the symptoms?

Although the risk of disease to other students is quite low, parents are advised to be alert for signs of meningococcal disease. Most people complain of stiff neck, fever and headache. These symptoms can develop over the course of several hours or take as long as one to two days. There can also be a rash that does not go away with pressure. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort in looking at bright lights, confusion and sleepiness. Newborns and infants may not have a stiff neck, but may appear slow or inactive, irritable or simply stop acting normally. As the disease progresses, patients of any age may have seizures. If any of these symptoms should develop, parents should take their child immediately to a physician or the emergency room to be evaluated for possible meningococcal disease. Antibiotic treatment of the disease is usually successful, especially if it is started early.

Can the disease be prevented?

To reduce the spread and the risk of this communicable disease, Dr. Wickenheiser recommends that adults and students avoid intimate contact and NOT share food, drinks, lip balm etc. In addition, Tehama County Public Health has available the meningococcal vaccine currently licensed for use in the United States, which protects against four of the five major meningococcal serogroups. It is 85 – 100% effective against those four, and the protection lasts from 3 to 10 years. This vaccine is available to children and young adults who are 11 years of age or older at the regularly scheduled immunization clinics at Tehama County Public Health.

Immunization Clinics: Public Health, Red Bluff, 1860 Walnut Street
 Wednesdays from 9:00 to 11:00 and from 5:00 to 6:00
 (530) 527-6824

 Public Health, Corning, 1600 Solano
 Tuesdays from 4:00 to 6:00
 (530) 824-4890

For more information, please contact Tehama County Health Services Agency, Public Health Division, at the numbers listed above or at 1-800-655-6854.

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