

Cameron Kaiser, MD
Public Health Officer

Susan Harrington, M.S., R.D.
Director, Department of Public Health

March 21, 2013

Dear School Colleagues:

MENINGITIS OUTBREAK IN TIJUANA, BAJA CALIFORNIA

The County of Riverside Department of Public Health seeks your assistance in raising awareness and preventing the spread of bacterial meningitis. Since January 1, 2013, there has been an unexpected rise in the number of cases of meningitis (caused by the bacteria, “meningococcus”) in Tijuana, Mexico. To date, 25 suspect cases have been reported; 17 are confirmed or probable cases and 16 of these had disease caused by the specific group C of the meningococcal bacteria. The most recent case was confirmed March 14, 2013. The median age of the 16 confirmed cases is 13 years (range 1 to 27 years). Five deaths have been reported there.

In Riverside County this year, there has only been one confirmed case of meningococcal disease (a 38-year old). The patient had not been to Tijuana.

School personnel can help prevent a meningitis outbreak on this side of the border in the following ways:

1. If you are aware of a student or staff member with signs and symptoms of meningitis, relay this to a school nurse working with your site or the district’s health office. Have a plan so that one representative from the school or district notifies Disease Control (see number below).
2. Observe for the following: fever, intense headache, lethargy, stiff neck, and/or a pinpoint rash that does not blanch under pressure.
3. School staff should take every opportunity to remind parents that a meningitis vaccine (MCV4) is routinely recommended for children and adolescents 11 to 18 years of age, with an initial dose recommended at age 11-12 and a booster at age 16 (or within five years of stating college). See attached notice for parents.
4. Routine hygiene recommendations should be reinforced at school. Hand washing is important. If permitted by school policy, allow students to bring in and use their own hand sanitizer. As bacteria can be spread through coughing and sneezing, teach students

that when a tissue is not available, they should cough or sneeze into their own elbow/sleeve, NOT their hand.

5. Sharing of saliva can spread disease so remind students not to share food or beverages, eating utensils, lipstick, or lip balm. Adults must not share cigarettes or pipes.

There are no changes in recommendations on travel to Tijuana or Mexico. Individuals traveling there should be aware of the recent reports of meningococcal disease and should promptly seek care for suggestive symptoms.

Report cases to Disease Control at (951) 358-5107, Monday – Friday, 8AM – 5PM or fax to (951) 358-5102. After hours use: 1-(888)-430-5195.

Any questions you have may be answered via one of the following web sites:

- Information about meningococcal disease: <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/>
- Information about meningococcal vaccination:
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/vaccine-info.html>
- Prevention and control of meningococcal disease:
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5407a1.htm>

Sincerely,

Barbara Cole, R.N., B.S.N., P.H.N.
Director, Disease Control Branch

Enclosure