MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE – CLIENT FACT SHEET

WHAT IS MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

Meningococcal disease is caused by a germ (a kind of bacteria) called meningococcus.

- ➢ It can cause meningitis (an infection of the lining of the brain) and meningococcemia (a bloodstream infection)
- ➢ These are two serious infections that require immediate medical treatment

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

Symptoms of meningococcal disease usually start suddenly and include:

- ➢ Severe headache
- ➢ Irritability and drowsiness
- ➢ Vomiting
- ➢ Purplish, bruise-like skin rash
- ➢ High fever
- ➢ Stiff neck

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ➢ The bacteria can be carried by 10% of the community at any given time and not cause any problems
- ➢ These people can be the source of infection for the few people who become ill
- ➢ It is not easy to get the disease. It is spread through direct contact with the oral or nasal secretions of the nose or mouth such as through kissing, coughing or sneezing
- ➢ The time from contact to illness can range from 1 – 10 days but is usually four days.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

All cases must be treated in hospital with an antibiotic.

- ➢ The Community Health Nurse will identify close contacts.
- ➢ Close contacts of the patient are given an antibiotic medicine
- ➢ This antibiotic lowers the risk of getting the disease and of spreading it to others
- ➢ Any person who has been in close contact with meningococcal disease and who gets sick must be seen by a health professional immediately

WHO ARE CLOSE CONTACTS?

- ➢ Household members
- ➢ Persons who share sleeping arrangements with the case
- ➢ Children and staff in child care and nursery school facilities
- ➢ Persons having direct contact with the secretions of the mouth or nose of the case

HOW IS IT PREVENTED?

- ➢ Good hygiene practice such as hand washing and routine cleaning
- ➢ Cover coughs and sneezes
- ➢ Wash hands after coughing or sneezing
- ➢ Children in Newfoundland and Labrador routinely receive meningococcal vaccine at 12 months and in Grade 4
- ➢ The Community Health Nurse will advise if vaccination is necessary