

MENINGITIS - EDUCATION FOR ALL

TEACHER'S HANDBOOK



24-hour nurse-led helpline
0800 028 18 28

www.meningitis-trust.org

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for requesting the Meningitis Trust's information pack for teachers.

We believe that there may be as many as 500,000 people living in the UK today who have had viral or bacterial meningitis, many of whom are coping with the impact every day of their lives. The after effects of meningitis can range from the loss of a limb where septicaemia has occurred, to less visible changes such as deafness, blindness, and brain damage. Others will experience a wide range of less debilitating but serious and long term after-effects including memory loss, balance problems, aggression, personality changes, sore or stiff joints, anxiety and depression. Sadly one in 10 will die.

The school faces key issues when someone in the school environment is affected by meningitis; whether it is a teacher or student who contracts the disease themselves, or a close friend or family member has the disease.

Designed specifically for teachers, this pack will help you to manage the impact of meningitis and septicaemia in your school and provide the best possible support for those affected by the disease. Specifically this pack will give you:

- Information about the disease
- Practical advice about what to do if someone in the school is affected
- Advice about what you can do now to raise awareness of meningitis amongst your staff, pupils and parents which can help save lives
- Details of our free services and how we can help you and your school
- Information about how you can help the Meningitis Trust

I hope you find this information pack useful, but don't forget the Meningitis Trust is only a phone call away, 24 hours a day on 0800 028 18 28.

Yours sincerely



Mark Porter

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WHY SHOULD TEACHERS BE CONCERNED ABOUT MENINGITIS?

As a teacher you should be aware of meningitis for four main reasons:

1 So that you can be aware of the signs and symptoms and know what to do if there is a case

Meningitis* can affect anyone at any time and can kill within hours. Teachers, pupils and parents should be aware of the signs and symptoms and know to seek medical help urgently if they think someone might be affected.

2 So that you can properly support a colleague or pupil who is affected

Having an understanding of the disease and its personal and professional impact will put you in a much better position to provide the appropriate physical and emotional support to a colleague or pupil who has been affected by meningitis, whether they have been affected directly or through a close family member contracting the disease. Knowing how the Meningitis Trust can help through its range of professional support services, including counselling, home visits, financial grants and freephone 24-hour nurse-led helpline, may also be of benefit to the individual, their family and friends and school.

Sadly, some people lose their lives to meningitis or have such serious after-effects they cannot return to school. An understanding of the disease and its implications can help you to manage with help from the Meningitis Trust.

3 So that you can manage the impact of the disease on the whole school

When someone is affected by meningitis, this can have significant implications for the whole school and community. It can raise issues such as:

- Fear
- Rumours
- Low attendance at school following a case

All of which can have an impact within the school.

4 Supporting a child starting at your school who has had meningitis when they were younger

See story on page 6.

*References to meningitis also include meningococcal septicaemia

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MENINGITIS - THE DISEASE AND ITS IMPACT

This section provides information and guidance to help you understand meningitis and its impact on the school. It contains information about both meningitis and septicaemia, the disease closely associated with meningitis, including:

- signs and symptoms
- prevention
- what happens if there is a case
- how meningitis can impact the school environment

Introduction

Meningitis can strike unexpectedly. The speed at which people become ill, and the devastating after-effects, make it an alarming disease. Meningitis can also be a source of great concern to staff and pupils, particularly when there has been close contact with someone who has contracted the disease.

A good understanding of the disease and its impact will put the school in a better position to support everyone and will help to more effectively manage issues that may arise. This could include anything from reassuring teachers and pupils following a case, to managing reintegration back in to the school environment.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is a serious infectious disease that can affect anyone at any time. Germs called bacteria or viruses are the major cause of meningitis in the UK. Many different bacteria and viruses can cause meningitis.

Viral meningitis is rarely life-threatening, although it can make people very unwell. Most people make a full recovery, but some can be left with after-effects.

Bacterial meningitis can be life threatening and needs urgent medical attention. Most people who suffer from bacterial meningitis will recover, but many can be left with a variety of after-effects. In some cases people can die.

The meningococcus is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK and causes most concern. The meningococcus can cause both meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). Meningococcal septicaemia can happen with meningitis or on its own. Septicaemia is generally more life threatening than meningitis and can also be caused by other germs.

Key Points

- Meningitis can affect anyone at any time
- Around 3000 cases of bacterial meningitis occur every year in the UK and there are probably more than double that number of cases of viral meningitis
- People can often be left with after-effects ranging from severe and permanent disabilities such as brain damage and deafness to less debilitating, but serious after-effects such as depression and memory loss. All of these can have a real impact on staff and pupils in the school
- A member of staff or pupil can be away from school for weeks or months whilst they recover
- A recent survey commissioned by the Meningitis Trust suggests that up to 10 million people in the UK, as many as 1 in 4 adults, know a relative, friend, colleague, or someone from their community who has contracted a form of meningitis
- Knowing the signs and symptoms can help save lives and minimise the impact of meningitis
- More than 18,000 people in the UK have died of meningitis in the last 60 years

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Who gets meningitis?

It is a common misconception that meningitis only affects children. Although babies and children are most at risk, adults get meningitis too. We estimate that each year in the UK there are more than 1,000 cases of meningitis in adults over the age of 16.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Meningitis and septicaemia are not always easy to recognise. In the early stages signs and symptoms can be similar to many other common illnesses, for example flu. Early symptoms can include fever, headache, nausea (feeling sick), vomiting and general tiredness.

Common signs and symptoms for children and adults include:

- Fever – cold hands and feet
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- Joint or muscle pain
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- A rash that does not disappear under pressure

Signs and symptoms can occur in any order and some may not occur at all.

In the unfortunate event that there is a case of meningitis in the school, you must be prepared to manage the situation quickly and efficiently. If someone is ill or deteriorating rapidly urgent medical help should be sought. All staff should know how to recognise the signs and symptoms of meningitis, because that can help save lives.

More information about the signs and symptoms and the emergency action to take can be found in our 'what is meningitis?' leaflet and on our handy wallet-sized symptoms cards. Visit our website at www.meningitis-trust.org for full details of the meningitis information leaflets, posters and online resources you can download or order online.

Can it be prevented?

Vaccination is the only way to prevent meningitis. Effective vaccines are available to prevent some types of meningitis.

Meningococcal group C vaccine (Men C)

This vaccine is available to anyone up to the age of 25. While the risk of the disease is generally low in adults, there is a greater risk for people up to the age of 25.

Pneumococcal vaccine

A new conjugate vaccine is now available as part of the routine vaccination programme for young children up to the age of 2. It is also available for young children deemed to be at higher risk of contracting pneumococcal infection up to the age of 5. There is also a polysaccharide vaccine available for adults over the age of 65 years. The vaccine is recommended for those who are at increased risk of getting pneumococcal infection, for example, those with serious breathing conditions, heart disease and diabetes.

There is currently no vaccination to protect against meningococcal group B (Men B), the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK.

If there are concerns about vaccination, advice and information should be sought via the GP or practice nurse. For more readable information on vaccination visit the immunisation website at www.immunisation.nhs.uk

What are the after-effects?

Many people survive meningitis and septicaemia but thousands are left with debilitating after-effects. These include deafness, blindness and brain damage. After-effects and complications of septicaemia include areas of scarring, loss of digits (fingers, thumbs and toes) and limbs, and organ damage.

Many people will experience a wide range of less debilitating, but still serious and life long after-effects. These can include memory loss, balance problems, aggression, personality changes, sore or stiff joints, anxiety and depression.

People may also experience tiredness, clumsiness and persistent headaches. Although these usually improve with time, they can be distressing and debilitating.

The impact of meningitis can cause problems when returning back in to the school environment.

What happens when there is a case of meningitis in the school environment?

Because the germs causing bacterial meningitis are not passed easily from person to person most cases are isolated. When there has been a case of meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia, the local public health office may offer antibiotics to those who have been identified as close contacts reducing the risk of further cases.

In the rare event that there is more than one case in the school, antibiotics may be offered to wider contacts. Each situation will be individually assessed and appropriate action taken by public health if necessary. Whatever action is thought necessary it will be in consultation with the Head Teacher of the school.

For every individual in the UK who has had meningitis, many more are touched by this disease and, in some cases, have their lives changed forever. If there is a case of meningitis in the school, it may cause a high level of anxiety and fear amongst everyone, so it is extremely important that accurate information is given out. The local public health team will work with the school to ensure good communication between all concerned. Anyone with concerns should be given the number for the Meningitis Trust 24-hour nurse-led helpline (**0800 028 18 28**). Nurses on the line can help answer questions and concerns.

What happens when there is a death in the school environment?

Sadly one in 10 cases of meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia can be fatal. For many the suddenness of the disease and the speed with which it develops is both shocking and overwhelming. Staff and pupils may be left feeling stunned and traumatised. There will be many unanswered questions about the disease and what has happened. This is where the Meningitis Trust can help. The 24-hour helpline 0800 028 18 28 is always available and the Trust can also provide a local Community Development Officer or counsellor to come in to the school to help answer questions and give support where needed.

A teacher's perspective - Anne's story



Anne Peters was 49 years old and a busy Head Teacher when she was struck down with meningococcal septicaemia in 2003. Anne has fought back and made a good recovery, but has been left with some after-effects including slight hearing loss, tiredness and memory problems.

Anne says: *"After Christmas, despite still not being able to wear a pair of 'proper' shoes due to discomfort and swelling, I persuaded the doctors to sign me back to work part time. But that did not happen and once back I was expected to take on a full role."*

"Parents sympathised but wanted a Head Teacher who could do the job, so I put on a brave face, stopped talking about myself and got on with it. By every Friday I was shattered, found problems finding the right words to say, forgot people's names and generally felt drained".

Anne gradually grew stronger, increasing the activities she was able to do on a day to day basis, and managed to take a group of children away on a school trip to Derbyshire in June.

Anne adds: *"Mentally I found it frustrating that my brain did not seem to be processing as quickly as before the illness."*

Her GP referred her to a Neurologist, although Anne was unhappy with the way he dealt with her. Telling her that she was doing all she could to improve, he added that as there were only a few cases of adults who had recovered from meningitis there was no advice to help her. (*Please see note at end of text.)

Anne is now several years on from contracting the meningococcal septicaemia which changed her life forever. She has decided that she needs to take time for herself and wants to pursue some of the hobbies that she had to give up to be able to find the energy to do her job following meningitis.

Finally Anne says: *"I took the decision earlier this year to hand in my notice and to try to improve the quality of my life. Looking back I should have taken more time off to recover, perhaps then I would not have taken the decision to stop being a Head Teacher."*

During recovery from meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia do not try to push yourself too far too soon. Listen to what your body is telling you, the longer you can take in your recovery the better the outcome can be for many.

(*Official statistics show, 15% of all cases of meningitis are left with severe after effects ranging from brain damage, hearing loss, loss of limbs (in some cases where septicaemia has occurred) and much more – for further details refer to the Meningitis Trust after-effects leaflet.)

A pupil's experience – Curtis Poole's personal story

Curtis Poole had meningitis when he was just a few hours old. Initially, his parents were told that he was unlikely to survive, but after three weeks in a special care unit Curtis was well enough to go home. The doctors were unable to say whether he would make a full recovery and his parents had to accept that he may have been left with permanent brain damage.

Initially Curtis appeared to be progressing well, but when he was two his parents noticed that he was not developing in the same way as his older siblings and that his younger sister was "overtaking him".

At playgroup, it was recognised that Curtis had developmental delay and over the next year his parents, together with the hospital consultant, playgroup and primary school staff, identified and assessed his problems. A Statement of Special Educational Needs was issued and Curtis has had full-time support, from the same teaching assistant, through primary school. To prepare him for his move to secondary school, Curtis was supported by five different teaching assistants throughout the week, so that the transition for him would be easier to cope with.



His parents feel that Curtis has had excellent support at school and his Mum says:

"Curtis is an extremely affectionate little boy and everyone loves him as he is always smiling. Although to look at him you would not think he has any problems, the children in his class seem to understand the need to be patient with him."

Curtis and his family have received support from the Meningitis Trust over the years and have accessed the financial grants, family days and contact with their local Community Development Officer. They also know that the Trust is only a phone call away and that they can pick the phone up anytime day or night – 0800 028 18 28.

RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Each person will be affected in a different way and will need to be treated individually. Patience and understanding are vital in helping the teacher or pupil to overcome any problems they might have as a result of meningitis. It is important for the school to consider the following general issues when managing the individuals return in to the school environment:

- School hours – are they up to doing a full day?
- Communication with the person affected
- Communication with teachers in the school ensuring they are aware of any after-effects or concerns
- Specialist equipment or extra help in lessons

School Hours

Part time school hours may need to be considered initially. It can take several weeks or months for someone who has been through the experience of meningitis to feel anything like fully fit again. They can feel anxious about returning back in to the school environment and being able to cope with the day to day demands.

Time may be needed for hospital and therapy appointments. Individuals who have suffered serious after-effects may need to attend outpatient appointments on a regular basis for many months. Those who have suffered less serious after-effects will still need time to adjust.

Communication with the person affected

With all the day-to-day activities that have to be managed in a busy school, it may be difficult to find the time to communicate properly with the individual affected by meningitis. This is particularly the case if the individual concerned is not present in the school environment and/or you have to communicate with them via someone else, such as their parent or partner. It is absolutely vital, however, that good communications exist at this critical time.

Meningitis pre-school age

When a pupil starts school, having had meningitis pre-school age, difficulties may be identified as they learn to cope with a new environment. There can be learning and behaviour problems, memory problems etc. staff need to be aware that after-effects of meningitis are real and need to be identified as soon as possible. If in doubt, concerns should be discussed with the parents involved and not left to go unmentioned. Parents should be encouraged to seek help and support from their GP. Further information about after-effects can be obtained from the Meningitis Trust via the 24-hour helpline.

Is it safe for this person to return to the school environment?

When a member of staff or a pupil has been away from school suffering from meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia, some will be concerned when the person returns to school. Fear and lack of knowledge is always a problem, but there is no risk to anyone. It is absolutely fine for the person who has been ill to be back. They will have had all the necessary treatment and will only be coming back because they are well enough to do so and are no longer infectious.

Time off

If a teacher or pupil is directly affected by meningitis it is likely that they will need considerable time off to recover, both physically and mentally. If someone is indirectly affected, perhaps by a child or partner contracting the illness, it is also likely that a member of staff may require time off to support the person affected. The impact of meningitis can lead to relationship difficulties and an enforced change of lifestyle.

Specialist equipment

You may find that a teacher or pupil who has been affected by meningitis requires specialist equipment to help them do the same as before.

For example, if they have to use a wheelchair because meningitis has resulted in the loss of limbs, the school may have to adapt the premises to accommodate them. If someone has lost their hearing they may require special technology for their PC and other aids that will help them during any oral communications. If someone has lost digits (fingers or thumbs) they may require a specialist keyboard or aids to help them write.

Training

You may find that a teacher or pupil who has been affected by meningitis requires re-training or help with certain pieces of equipment in the school environment. Most activities we carry out without much thought; however a simple step of leaving instructions for use close to any piece of equipment, such as a photocopier or fax machine can reduce the stress for those affected.

Communication with the school environment

It is important that staff and pupils are informed of an individual's progress as they recover. This can be achieved through regular updates via staff, school assemblies, notice boards etc. Sufferers can feel tired and emotional and the knowledge that other people are aware of their illness can help the recovery process.

HOW THE MENINGITIS TRUST CAN HELP YOU

The Meningitis Trust can help you raise awareness of meningitis in your school and support those who have been affected by the disease. The services, support and education provided by the Meningitis Trust are a lifeline for people in the UK whose lives have been touched by meningitis.

Free Information Literature

The Meningitis Trust produces a range of clear and concise literature which is available free, including:

- Wallet-sized cards showing signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia
- Leaflets giving general information about meningitis
- Leaflets explaining the after-effects and support available from the Meningitis Trust
- Various posters featuring the signs and symptoms of meningitis

Visit our website at www.meningitis-trust.org for full details of the meningitis information leaflets, posters and online resources you can download or order online.

The school can help raise awareness of meningitis by displaying signs and symptoms posters and cards on notice boards and in the reception area. The school could give every family a symptoms card to keep at home.

24-hour nurse-led helpline (0800 028 18 28) & children's helpline (0808 801 03 88)

The Meningitis Trust's helplines are available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. Led by specially trained nurses they offer information and support in over 100 languages. The helplines are also the gateway to all the support services the Meningitis Trust provides to those who have been affected by the disease.

If anyone in the school environment has any queries or concerns about meningitis they should be directed to the helplines. Sometimes simply talking to someone can be all that is needed and we are always only a phone call away.

One-to-one Contacts

A teacher or pupil affected by meningitis may benefit from talking to someone who shares an experience of the disease similar to their own. The Meningitis Trust provides a one-to-one contact service to put people with similar experiences in touch with each other.

Home Visits

An experience of meningitis can leave sufferers and their families confused and traumatised. A member of staff or pupil who has been affected by the disease may not know what the future holds and what help is available to them.

The Meningitis Trust provides a free home visiting service involving a trained nurse or counsellor. During the visit they will provide detailed information on all of the free support services the Meningitis Trust provides. They can answer questions and can identify further ways in which the Trust can help. Most importantly people realise they are not on their own.

Counselling

The Meningitis Trust is committed to providing ongoing support to those affected by meningitis and because the trauma caused by the disease can vary from person to person, we provide tailored support when necessary. Our counselling service provides professional support to anyone directly or indirectly affected by meningitis anywhere in the UK and Ireland. We offer counselling free, in a confidential and safe environment, helping people to rebuild their lives after meningitis.

Financial Grants

Meningitis can have a devastating impact on people's lives, which is why the Meningitis Trust offers financial support as well as emotional support. The Meningitis Trust provides discretionary financial support grants to enhance the quality of life for people who have been affected by meningitis. Grants are available for a variety of needs including special equipment and aids; therapeutic activities; respite care; re-education; special training; travel and accommodation costs, and much more.

Community Development Officers

The Trust has a network of Community Development Officers around the country. They do valuable work in supporting the community and will come in to the school environment, at any time, to give presentations, and talks to staff, pupils and parents. They can also assist in a PSHE session, to help broaden a pupil's knowledge of meningitis and the work of the Meningitis Trust.

Contact for your local Community Development Officer can be made through the Meningitis Trust on 01453 768000 and asking for the details of the Officer who looks after your area, or through our website.

Website

The Trust has a learning website dedicated to children, teachers and parents at www.meningitis-learning.org. This site is split in to three groups, Monty & Friends for the younger children, The Youth Zone for 12yrs-18yrs, and a Parents & Teachers area. The site is interactive and gives useful information on the illness and the Trust. It also provides teaching resources.

**To speak with someone about meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia,
please call on the numbers below, email support@meningitis-trust.org
or visit www.meningitis-learning.org**

**24-hour nurse-led Helpline
0800 028 18 28**

**24-hour nurse-led Children's Helpline
0808 801 0388**

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HOW YOU CAN HELP THE MENINGITIS TRUST

Our work in helping everyone who is coping with the impact of meningitis and raising awareness of this devastating disease is funded almost entirely through support from individuals and organisations in the community, including a number of schools/colleges choosing to fundraise for the Meningitis Trust.

As a national organisation we have Community Development Officers in all regions and we can arrange for one of them to come in to your school to give a presentation on the Trust and how you might like to get involved.

If you would like further information on how your school can get involved in helping the Meningitis Trust, or to request a Schools Fundraising Pack, please call us on **01453 768000** and one of our fundraising team will give you all the support, information and materials you need to help with any fundraising you might like to get involved in. They will also be able to give you details of the Community Development Officer local to your area.

Thank you for your interest in our work. Without support from people like you, the Meningitis Trust would not be able to continue its vital work.