March 28, 2013

Meningococcal Disease Alert

The San Diego County Public Health Department has been monitoring the increase in cases of Invasive Meningococcal Disease that has been confirmed in 18 individuals in Tijuana, Mexico since January 2013. There have been a number of deaths there. There have also been three (3) cases of Meningococcal Disease within San Diego County this year. Last year, there were eight (8) cases in San Diego County.

Meningococcal (muh-NIN-jah-kah-kul) disease is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection. The disease is most commonly expressed as meningitis, an attack of the brain and spinal cord, or meningococcemia, a presence of bacteria in the blood. Meningococcal disease is spread through close contact with an infected individual, usually through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions.

At this time, there have been no changes in routine health recommendations for those who are traveling to Tijuana. Routine hygiene recommendations should be followed – do not share: food or beverages, eating utensils, toothbrushes, cigarettes, pipes, lipstick, or lip balm. This disease can also be spread by kissing, smoking and living in close quarters with someone who is infected. Symptoms may include fever, intense headache, lethargy, stiff neck, and a rash that does not blanch under pressure. Anyone with potential exposure who develops any of these symptoms should immediately contact a healthcare provider or emergency room for evaluation of possible meningococcal disease. The time between exposure to the disease and the onset of symptoms can be between two (2) to 10 days.

A vaccine is available to prevent certain strains of the meningococcal disease and is recommended for those 11 to 18 years of age. Vaccination is also recommended for other populations at risk.

Where can I get more information about meningococcal meningitis and vaccination?

- You can consult your primary physician/provider, CSUSM Student Health and Counseling Services or the San Diego County public health department.
- You can also visit these websites:

Meningitis Foundation of America: www.musa.org
American College Health Association: www.acha.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org

Stay healthy this spring,

Dr. Karen Nicholson, M.P.H.
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