

**Important communication to Schools, Kura and Early Childhood Services from
Northland District Health Board**

Meningococcal W Vaccination Programme - Northland

There is a community outbreak of meningococcal W disease in Northland. We need to vaccinate people who are most likely to carry the disease and infect others, which will help to prevent the spread and manage this outbreak.

The Ministry of Health and the Northland DHB have been working closely together once the community outbreak was identified in mid-November to identify the best response. Action has been taken immediately once a decision to undertake an outbreak vaccination response was made.

Before now, cases have been sporadic and have been dealt with on an individual case-by-case basis with antibiotics to the affected individual and their close contacts.

Northland DHB will be undertaking a vaccination programme for children aged from **9 months to under 5 years and those aged 13 to under 20 years and who are Northland domiciled residents.**

We are targeting children under 5 because this is the population that is generally most affected by meningococcal disease. As a result, vaccinating this age group will protect them from getting meningococcal disease. However, the vaccine cannot be given to babies under 9 months.

We're targeting 13 to under 20-year-olds because this is the age group that carries the bacterium that causes the disease in their throats – they are carriers. This means that even if they have no symptoms, carriers can infect those around them. Vaccinating this age group will lower the number of carriers in a population and stop the spread of meningococcal disease across the entire community. In other words, vaccinating this age group will protect the whole population.

Northland will have a regional communications campaign via newspaper, social media and radio to ensure that those who are eligible for vaccination, and their caregivers, are aware of the programme, and where they can get vaccinated.

The Ministry has advised us that vaccine stocks are limited, both nationally and internationally. Therefore we have been instructed by the Ministry to start vaccinating those most at risk from the disease and also those most likely to carry the disease and infect others. There is a global shortage of the vaccine due to larger outbreaks overseas. New Zealand has purchased the 20,000 doses that are available immediately to start the vaccination campaign.

The vaccine programme will start in early December. The focus of the campaign is to stop the spread throughout the Northland region and is timely in this regard.

The timing this close to Christmas and school holidays makes the logistics challenging but the Northland DHB and Ministry did not want to wait until the New Year to commence the vaccination campaign.

The logistics of the campaign have yet to be finalised by Northland DHB, but will likely occur via community clinics throughout Northland – the venues are in the process of being confirmed and will be published in media, on radio and also on the Northland DHB website. www.northlanddhb.org.nz

We urge parents/caregivers to monitor the media information that will come out in the next week around venues for the programme in order that your child/children can be vaccinated.