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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: Health Care Providers
From: Dr. Puthiery Va, Director, Maine CDC
Subject: **Meningococcal Disease and Respiratory Virus Illnesses in Washington County**
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Meningococcal Disease and Respiratory Virus Illnesses in Washington County

Summary

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) is reporting a case of invasive meningococcal disease in an adult in Washington County. The Maine CDC is also aware of increased respiratory illness activity in this area including outbreaks of influenza A, influenza B, and COVID-19. The Maine CDC is asking clinicians in the area to screen ill individuals for signs of meningitis, as well as to test for respiratory viruses.

Background

Meningococcal disease refers to any illness caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. This disease can cause infections of the lining of the brain or spinal cord (meningitis), or bloodstream. These illnesses can range from mild to severe. The most common symptoms of meningitis include fever, headache, and neck stiffness. Additional symptoms may include confusion, photophobia, nausea, and vomiting.

The *N. meningitidis* bacteria can spread from one person to another through contact with an infected person's saliva. Infected people are contagious from 7 days before their symptom onset until 24 hours after the initiation of antibiotics. It is not spread through the air, on surfaces, or in the stool or urine. It is not as contagious as the pathogens that cause the common cold or flu. Generally, it takes close contact to spread these bacteria, such as kissing or sharing food or drinks. The incubation period ranges from 1 to 10 days but is most often 3 to 4 days.

COVID-19, influenza, and RSV along with other respiratory viruses commonly circulate in the fall and winter and can also range from mild to severe. Common respiratory virus symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, and a stuffy or runny nose. Many of the symptoms are non-specific to pathogen, which may make it difficult to differentiate.

Symptoms that are more specific for **meningococcal disease** include:

- Headache
- Photophobia
- Neck pain
- Sudden onset rash
- Altered mental status
- Rapidly worsening illness

Control Measures

The Maine CDC is conducting contact tracing related to the meningococcal case and is coordinating with local providers to offer antibiotic post-exposure prophylaxis.

Providers in Washington County specifically, but also statewide, should encourage influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations, and assess whether patients are recommended for meningococcal vaccine and administer, if appropriate. The Maine CDC encourages providers to remind their patients to stay up to date on all recommended respiratory and seasonal vaccinations and offer patients vaccines when eligible.

Key points for providers:

- Consider meningococcal disease for patients presenting with fever, headache, and stiff neck, especially those with a potential exposure in Washington County.
- For suspect meningococcal cases, obtain specimens for testing before administering antibiotics or as soon as possible thereafter.
    - Positive specimens are required to be forwarded to the Maine CDC's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL). The following are acceptable types of samples: CSF for PCR testing or isolates for culture.
- Test for routine respiratory pathogens such as influenza, COVID-19, or RSV.
- Encourage influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Assess if patients are eligible for meningococcal vaccine and administer, if appropriate.
    - Vaccine is not recommended as post-exposure prophylaxis after exposure.
- Utilize appropriate precautions for respiratory viruses and droplet precautions for suspected meningococcal cases.
    - Suspect cases of meningococcal disease should be on droplet precautions until 24 hours after antibiotics are administered.
    - Follow your facility's procedures for environmental cleaning.

Reporting requirements:

All cases of meningococcal disease must be reported immediately by phone to 1-800-821-5821. Timely reporting can facilitate early administration of chemoprophylaxis to close contacts, recognition and prevention of outbreaks, and serogrouping of isolates, which allows the Maine CDC to implement appropriate prevention recommendations rapidly.

COVID-19 is reportable, as are influenza hospitalizations, influenza pediatric deaths, and all outbreaks.

For More Information:

- U.S. CDC's webpage: https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/index.html
- Maine CDC Respiratory Virus Dashboard https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/data-reports/diseases/infectious-disease/respiratory-dashboard
- HETL's webpage: https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/services/maine-public-health-laboratory/clinical-microbiology

- Maine Immunization Program webpage: https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/diseases-conditions/immunization