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Newsletter

16th March 2026

Week 12

This newsletter contains important information for Pharmacy Owners and Staffs in Kent & Medway



URGENT UPDATE



UKHSA cluster notification Re: Outbreak of meningococcal disease linked to University of Kent and the area of Canterbury

Please find [attached advice from the UK Health Security Agency](#). This is a rapidly evolving situation, and advice will be updated as further information emerges.

What has happened?

Between 13 and 15 March 2026, the UKHSA was made aware of thirteen cases of invasive meningococcal disease.

Sadly, two people are known to have died.

UKHSA, the University of Kent and the local health system are working together to respond to the outbreak and support those affected.

What action has been taken so far in Kent to reassure students?

UKHSA has worked with the University of Kent to provide advice letters to all 16,000 students, advising on recent cases, signs and symptoms, how to obtain antibiotics, and what to do if they feel unwell.

Antibiotics are being made available to students and distributed at a dedicated site on campus.

UKHSA staff continue to contact trace family and friends of known cases to identify anyone else who may be at risk, and to establish a clearer picture of the

events leading to this cluster of cases.

UKHSA has worked with the local NHS Trust and NHS Kent and Medway to ensure hospital staff and GPs are aware and to be vigilant for possible cases in any patients.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is an uncommon but serious illness caused by meningococcal bacteria, which can lead to meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning).

The onset of illness is often sudden, and early diagnosis and treatment are vital.

Which strain is responsible for the outbreak?

The specific strain has not yet been identified.

Investigations are ongoing and we will share further information as it becomes available.

What action is being taken in the community?

UKHSA specialists are interviewing affected individuals and their families to identify close contacts and arrange antibiotics to limit further spread.

Close contacts of cases have already been given antibiotics as a precautionary measure.

Advice and support is being offered to the wider university community, and to local hospitals and NHS 111.

What are the symptoms to look out for?

Symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can include:

A rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass

Sudden onset of high fever

Severe and worsening headache

Stiff neck

Vomiting and diarrhoea

Joint and muscle pain

Dislike of bright lights

Very cold hands and feet

Seizures
Confusion or delirium
Extreme sleepiness or difficulty waking

What should I do if I am concerned about myself or someone else?

If you or someone you know develops symptoms of meningitis or septicaemia, seek medical help urgently by going to the nearest Accident and Emergency department or calling 999. If a friend goes to bed unwell, check on them regularly. Early treatment can be lifesaving. You can also contact your GP or call NHS 111 if you are concerned.

Am I at risk if I have been vaccinated?

The MenACWY vaccine offers good protection against several strains of meningococcal disease and is routinely offered to teenagers in school Years 9 and 10.

However, it does not protect against all strains. Other strains, such as MenB, can circulate among young adults. This is why it is important for everyone to know the signs and symptoms regardless of vaccination status.

Where can I find further information and support?

NHS: www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis

Meningitis Research Foundation: www.meningitis.org | 0808 800 3344 (24 hours)

Meningitis Now: www.meningitisnow.org | 0808 80 10 388 (9am–8pm)

Community Pharmacy Kent

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