

DEATH OF A STUDENT KNOWN CAUSE

(Date)

Parents and Guardians:

We are very sad to inform you that one of our students died over the weekend. The student, a (grade) grader, died last night from meningococcal disease. The students are dealing not only with the death of a classmate and friend but also the fear of the disease. I would like to share some basic information to help calm fears and inform parents. Meningococcal disease is caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Infection with this bacteria may lead to “poisoning of the blood,” (septicemia), meningitis, and rarely death.

How is it spread? By direct contact, including respiratory droplets from the nose and throat of the infected person. Fortunately none of the bacteria are as contagious as things like the common cold or flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningococcal has been. The contact must be close and prolonged. For instance: household members, boyfriend/girlfriend, or people in direct contact with oral secretions.

What are the signs and symptoms? Because the symptoms can be similar to flu, it can be difficult in the beginning to diagnose. Sudden onset of fever, intense headache, nausea, and often vomiting, joint/muscle pain, stiff neck and frequently a rash that is red and pinpoint or reddish purple like a rug burn often occur. The rash is a sign that the bacteria is in the blood and spreading rapidly.

Treatment: Prompt medical attention and antibiotics.

Prevention: Close contacts of persons with meningococcal disease can receive an oral antibiotic, which decreases the risk of subsequent development of the disease. Unfortunately, the type of meningococcal disease present in our area cannot be prevented by vaccination.

The bacteria, which cause meningococcal, are very common. Most of us will carry them at some stage in our lives without developing any illness. Only a tiny portion of the population will develop meningitis or septicemia if they come into contact with the bacteria. The bacteria are very weak. They survive for only a short period of time outside the body, so they cannot live long in the air and are not carried on household objects such as clothes, furniture or books.

Although not very common, it can develop rapidly so it is vital for everyone to know the signs and symptoms of the disease. Please keep this in mind if your child complains of the symptoms listed. It is not usually necessary for casual contacts to be treated, if you are not sure if your student is at risk, please call your health care provider, your local health department, (phone number) or the school nurse, (name), at (phone number).

Sincerely,

(Principal name)
Principal