

Friday, June 2, 2017

Free meningococcal vaccine a shot in the arm for senior students

Parents are being urged to check whether their children in Years 11 and 12 have brought home consent forms for the free meningococcal ACWY vaccine, needed to protect against the rare but deadly disease.

Year 11 and 12 students are eligible for the free vaccine as part of the NSW Government's \$9 million NSW Meningococcal W Response Program, introduced by NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard due to an unprecedented outbreak of meningococcal W disease in Australia.

In 2016, there were 10 cases of meningococcal disease in South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) residents of which half were group W disease compared to nil group W cases in 2015.

SESLHD's Public Health Unit is running the vaccination program in 90 high schools in the District.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director, Public Health, SESLHD, said that the meningococcal ACWY vaccine, which protects against four serogroups of meningococcal bacteria, is being offered in Term 2 for year 12 students and terms 2 and 3 for year 11 students.

"I strongly encourage parents to take advantage of this very important opportunity and sign and return the consent forms, because meningococcal disease can result in lifelong complications, or even death," Professor Ferson said.

"Teens are one of the groups most at risk of developing meningococcal disease. This is due to social behaviours that result in the disease being transmitted through close physical contact.

"Students who had the meningococcal C vaccine as young children should also have the current ACWY vaccine to cover them against the meningococcal serogroup W strain."

The publicly-funded vaccine has now been made available by NSW Health to general practitioners for Year 11 and 12 students who have underlying medical problems and prefer to be vaccinated by their own doctors and those aged 17 or 18 who are no longer at school.

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