

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KDHE and Barton County investigating fatal case of meningococcal meningitis

TOPEKA, Kan. – The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and the Barton County Health Department (BCHD) are collaborating with health care and other public health partners to investigate the death of a Central Kansas adult. Laboratory results have confirmed that the death was caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*, which can cause severe and fatal cases of meningococcal meningitis, an infection of the tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord.

Signs and symptoms of meningococcal meningitis include a sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, chills, and feeling unusually weak or tired. Nausea, vomiting, altered mental state, and a dark purple rash may also be present.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest the general public is at an increased risk of developing meningitis. BCHD is working to identify all persons at high risk of exposure to the individual and is actively providing recommendations for antibiotic prophylaxis.

N. meningitidis is only spread from person-to-person by sharing throat or respiratory secretions (saliva or spit). You must be in close contact with a sick person's saliva or respiratory secretions in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact can include being directly sneezed or coughed upon, kissing, sharing a water bottle, or sharing eating/drinking utensils. It is not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends post-exposure antibiotics for household, close, or intimate contacts during the 7 days prior to illness onset. Health care professionals who had unprotected contact with the respiratory secretions will also receive post-exposure antibiotics.

If you are experiencing symptoms of meningococcal meningitis, immediately visit your primary care physician, an urgent care medical clinic or emergency room.

A vaccine is available to protect individuals from certain types of meningococcal meningitis. While the vaccine is not used to treat people who have already been exposed to an infected person, it can prevent future infections. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and KDHE recommends meningococcal vaccine for the following groups:

- All children and teens, ages 11 through 18 years
- People age 2 months and older with functional or anatomic asplenia
- People age 2 months and older who have persistent complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder, including people taking eculizumab [Soliris])

(more)

- People age 2 months and older with HIV infection
- People younger than 22 years of age if they are or will be a first-year college student living in a residential hall

Questions may be directed to the Barton County Health Department at (620) 793-1902 or the Kansas Department of Health and Environment at (877) 427-7317.

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KDHE's mission is to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans.