MENINGITIS - EVERYONE’S BUSINESS

EMPLOYER’S INFORMATION PACK
Dear employer

Thank you for requesting the Meningitis Trust’s information pack for employers.

We believe that there may be as many as 500,000 people living in the UK today who have had viral or bacterial meningitis, many of whom are coping with the impact every day of their lives. The aftereffects of meningitis can range from the loss of a limb where septicaemia has occurred, to less visible changes such as deafness, blindness, and brain damage. Others will experience a wide range of less debilitating but serious and long term after-effects including memory loss, balance problems, aggression, personality changes, sore or stiff joints, anxiety and depression.

Employers face difficult business issues when an employee is affected by meningitis, either contracting the disease themself, or affected because a close friend or family member has the disease. Issues including staff response, customer relations, and productivity can all have an impact on a company’s bottom line.

Designed specifically for employers, this pack will help you to manage the impact of meningitis and septicaemia on your business and provide the best possible support for employees affected by the disease. Specifically, this pack will give you:

- Information about the disease
- Practical advice about what to do if one of your employees is affected
- Advice about what you can do now to raise awareness of meningitis amongst your employees
- Details of our services and how we can help you and your employees
- Information about how you can help the Meningitis Trust

I hope you find this information pack useful.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mark Porter, MB BS DA DCH
WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS BE CONCERNED ABOUT MENINGITIS?

As an employer you should be aware of meningitis for three main reasons:

1. **So that you can be aware of the signs and symptoms and know what to do if there is a case**

   Meningitis* can affect anyone at any time and can kill within hours. Employers and employees should be aware of the signs and symptoms and know to seek medical help urgently if they think themselves or one of their colleagues might be affected.

2. **So that you can properly support an employee who is affected**

   Having an understanding of the disease and its personal and professional impact will put you in a much better position to provide the appropriate physical and emotional support to an employee who has been affected by meningitis, whether they have been affected directly or through a close family member contracting the disease. Knowing how the Meningitis Trust can help your employees through its range of support services including counselling, home visits and financial grants, may also be of benefit to both you and your employee.

   It is possible that an employee will not return to work following their experience of meningitis. As well as addressing the resulting loss of skill and knowledge, your business may also face additional costs in terms of recruiting and training a replacement. An understanding of the disease and its implications can help you manage the impact on the workplace and give those affected the support they need.

   Employers also need to consider Disability Discrimination legislation, for employees suffering from the impact of meningitis.

3. **So that you can manage the business impact of the disease**

   When an employee is affected by meningitis, this can have significant implications for the workplace. It can raise issues such as:

   - Productivity
   - Customer relations
   - Staff response
   - Reallocation of work/ reprioritising activities
   - Communication

   All of which can have an impact on the bottom line.

   *References to meningitis also include meningococcal septicaemia

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www.meningitis-trust.org

24-hour nurse-led helpline
0800 028 18 28
The employee's perspective - Andree's story

Andree Rogers knows from experience the devastating impact that meningitis can have on a person’s professional life. Andree works as a Social Worker in the Youth Offending Team for her local Council.

“I contracted meningitis in July 2003,” recalls Andree now 44. “I thought I had a bad case of flu and called a doctor. Whilst waiting for the doctor I noticed a purplish rash on my hands and immediately recognised it as the septicaemia rash.

The doctor gave me an injection and, in agonising pain, I was taken to hospital where tests confirmed I had meningitis. I spent a week unconscious, in intensive care. During this time a priest was twice called to read me my last rites.”

Thankfully Andree recovered and before long she was back at home, coming to terms with what had happened and rebuilding her strength. The road to recovery can be long and difficult and, even with support from the Meningitis Trust, it was more than ten months before Andree was able to return to work. Meningitis has had a huge impact on her working life.

Andree explains: “Integrating back into the workplace was incredibly challenging. I felt that no-one really understood what I’d been through or the difficulties I faced returning to work.

As a result of the meningitis I have a poor memory which means that I have to repeatedly ask my colleagues how to do things that others might take for granted, for example how to use a photocopier. My confidence takes a knock every time I have to ask. I still suffer from frequent bouts of nausea and, as you can imagine, this can be a big problem, particularly during meetings.”

The employer's perspective - Julie's story

Julie Bryant, HR Manager at Andree’s place of work, agrees: “When Andree was affected by meningitis it had a real impact on the business.”

“We had to source specialist equipment for her and had to manage issues such as how we communicate with Andree during her absence; recruiting long-term cover to ensure that our clients were not affected; and communicating effectively yet sensitively with other employees about Andree’s absence and its business implications.

“The Meningitis Trust’s Employer’s Information Pack proved very useful in helping us manage the business impact of the disease. I think all employers across the UK would benefit from such a resource.”
This section provides information and guidance to help you understand meningitis and its impact on the workplace. It contains information about both meningitis and septicaemia, the disease closely associated with meningitis, including:

- signs and symptoms
- prevention
- what happens if there is a case
- how meningitis can impact the workplace

**Introduction**

Meningitis can strike unexpectedly. The speed at which people become ill, and the devastating after-effects, make it an alarming disease. Meningitis can also be a source of great concern to staff, particularly when there has been close contact with a colleague or family member who has contracted the disease.

A good understanding of the disease and its impact will put you in a better position to support employees affected and will help you to more effectively manage issues in the workplace relating to meningitis. This could include anything from reassuring staff following a case, to managing an employee’s reintegration into the workplace.

**What is meningitis?**

Meningitis is a serious infectious disease that can affect anyone at any time. Germs called bacteria and viruses are the major cause of meningitis in the UK. Many different bacteria and viruses can cause meningitis.

**Viral meningitis** is rarely life-threatening, although it can make people very unwell. Most people who get viral meningitis recover after a few weeks without any specific treatment but are often left with after-effects.

**Bacterial meningitis** can be life threatening and needs urgent medical attention. Most people who suffer from bacterial meningitis will recover, but some may be left with serious after-effects. In some cases people can die.

The meningococcus is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK and causes most concern. The meningococcus can cause both meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). Meningococcal septicaemia can happen with meningitis or on its own. Septicaemia is generally more life threatening than meningitis and can also be caused by other germs.

**Key Points**

- Meningitis can affect anyone at any time
- Around 3000 cases of bacterial meningitis occur every year in the UK and there are probably more than double that number of cases of viral meningitis
- People can often be left with after-effects ranging from severe and permanent disabilities such as brain damage and deafness to less debilitating, but serious after-effects such as depression and memory loss. All of these can have a real impact on employees in the workplace.
- Employees can be away from work for weeks or months whilst they recover
- A recent survey commissioned by the Meningitis Trust suggests that up to 10 million people in the UK, as many as 1 in 4 adults, know a relative, friend, work colleague, or someone from their community who has contracted a form of meningitis
- Knowing the signs and symptoms can help save lives and minimise the impact of meningitis
- More than 18,000 people in the UK have died of meningitis in the last 60 years
Who gets meningitis?

It is a common misconception that meningitis only affects children. Although babies and children are most at risk, adults get meningitis too. We estimate that each year in the UK there are more than 1,000 cases of meningitis in adults over the age of 16.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Meningitis and septicaemia are not always easy to recognise. In the early stages signs and symptoms can be similar to many other more common illnesses, for example flu. Early symptoms can include fever, headache, nausea (feeling sick), vomiting and general tiredness.

Common signs and symptoms for children and adults include:

- Fever – cold hands and feet
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- Joint or muscle pain
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- A rash that does not disappear under pressure

Signs and symptoms can occur in any order and some may not occur at all.

In the unfortunate event that there is a case of meningitis in your workplace, you must be prepared to manage the situation quickly and efficiently. If someone is ill or deteriorating rapidly you should get medical help immediately. Everyone should know how to recognise the signs and symptoms, because that can help save lives.

More information about the signs and symptoms and the emergency action to take can be found in our ‘what is meningitis?’ leaflet and on our handy wallet-sized symptoms cards. (Please see the order form at the end of this information pack.)

Can it be prevented?

Vaccination is the only way to prevent meningitis. Effective vaccines are available to prevent some types of meningitis.

Meningococcal group C vaccine (Men C)

This vaccine is available to anyone up to the age of 25. While the risk of the disease is generally low in adults, there is a greater risk for people up to the age of 25.

Pneumococcal vaccine

A Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) is now available as part of the childhood immunisation programme. It is routinely offered at 2, 4 and 13 months of age. A Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine (PPV) is also available and this vaccine is routinely offered to people aged 65 years and over. Pneumococcal vaccinations are recommended for adults who are at an increased risk of pneumococcal disease, for example, those with asthma, chronic heart disease and diabetes.

There is currently no vaccination to protect against meningococcal group B (Men B), the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK.

If your employees are concerned about vaccination they should speak to their GP or practice nurse. For more information on vaccination visit the immunisation website at www.immunisation.nhs.uk
What are the after-effects?

Many people survive meningitis and septicaemia but thousands are left with debilitating after-effects. These include deafness, blindness and brain damage. After-effects and complications of septicaemia include areas of scarring, loss of digits (fingers, thumbs and toes) and limbs, and organ damage.

Many people will experience a wide range of less debilitating but still serious and life long after-effects. These can include memory loss, balance problems, aggression, personality changes, sore or stiff joints, anxiety and depression.

People may also experience tiredness, clumsiness and persistent headaches. Although these usually improve with time, they can be distressing and debilitating.

The impact of meningitis can cause problems when returning to work.

What happens when there is a case in the workplace?

Because the germs causing bacterial meningitis are not passed easily from person to person most cases are isolated. When there has been a case of meningitis or meningococcal septicaemia, the local public health office may offer antibiotics to people who have been identified as close contacts reducing the risk of further cases. This measure is not usually necessary for workplace contacts and normal work patterns can be followed. When a member of staff returns to work they pose no health threat to colleagues.

In the rare event that there is more than one case in the workplace, antibiotics may be offered to wider contacts. Each situation will be individually assessed and appropriate action taken by the public health office. If you have an occupational health department they may co-ordinate the appropriate action with public health.

For every individual in the UK who has had meningitis, many more are touched by this disease and, in some cases, have their lives changed forever. If there is a case of meningitis in your workplace, it may cause a high level of anxiety and fear amongst employees so it is extremely important that accurate information is given to employees. The local public health team will work with you to ensure good communication between all those concerned. Employees should be given the telephone number for our 24 hour nurse-led helpline (0800 028 18 28), which can help to answer their questions and concerns.
RETURNING TO WORK

Each person will be affected in a different way and will need to be treated individually. Patience and understanding are vital in helping the sufferer to overcome any problems they might have as a result of meningitis. It is important for employers to consider the following general issues when managing an employee affected by meningitis:

- Working hours
- Communication with the person affected
- Communication with work colleagues
- Reallocation of work / temporary resource
- Specialist equipment
- Training
- Client and supplier relations

Working Hours

Part time working may need to be considered initially. People may be anxious about returning to work and being able to cope with the demands of their job. Flexible working arrangements will enable employees to integrate back into the workplace as they feel able. Returning to work too soon can delay recovery and cause further problems.

Time may be needed for hospital and therapy appointments. People who have suffered serious after-effects may need to attend outpatient appointments on a regular basis for many months. Those who have suffered less serious after-effects will still need time to adjust and accept their limitations.

Communication with the person affected

With all the day-to-day business activities that have to be managed, employers may find it difficult to find the time to communicate properly with an employee affected by meningitis. This is particularly the case if that person is not present in the workplace and/or you have to communicate with them via someone else, such as their partner. It is absolutely vital, however, that good communications exist between employer and employee at this critical time.

Communication with work colleagues

Employers also need to ensure that the colleagues of the employee directly affected by meningitis are kept up-to-date. Although medical information is confidential, colleagues will appreciate knowing whether or not their colleague is recovering well. Sufferers can feel tired and emotional and the knowledge that other people are aware of their illness can help the recovery process. Also, colleagues need to know about the impact on their role and responsibilities.
Reallocation of work / Temporary resource

If an employee is directly affected by meningitis it is likely that they will need considerable time off in order to recover, both physically and mentally. If an employee is indirectly affected, perhaps through their child contracting meningitis, it is also likely that they will need time off to support the person affected and come to terms with what has happened. The impact of meningitis can lead to relationship difficulties and an enforced change of lifestyle. To ensure that your business continues to function effectively in the absence of an employee it is likely that you’ll need to consider reallocating workload and/or employing temporary resource.

Specialist equipment

You may find that an employee who has been affected by meningitis requires specialist equipment to help them do the same job as before.

For example, if an employee has to use a wheelchair because meningitis has resulted in the loss of limbs, an employer may have to adapt the workplace to accommodate the employee’s new needs. If an employee has lost their hearing they may require special technology for their PC that displays subtitles during any oral communications. If someone has lost digits (fingers or thumbs) they may require a specialist keyboard.

Training

You may find that an employee who has been affected by meningitis requires re-training in certain aspects of their job. Training could be required for an activity that most employees would do without much thought, for example, using a photocopier or fax machine. Employers may want to consider leaving operating instructions close to any equipment.

Training may also be required for any new, specialist equipment that is introduced into the workplace.

Client and supplier relations

Effective relations with both clients and suppliers is vital to most businesses. It is important that when an employee is affected by meningitis that employers consider the impact this might have on clients and suppliers and that they manage that impact appropriately.
HOW THE MENINGITIS TRUST CAN HELP YOU

The Meningitis Trust can help you raise awareness of meningitis amongst your employees and support employees who have been affected by the disease.

The services, support and education provided by the Meningitis Trust are a lifeline for people in the UK whose lives have been touched by meningitis.

Free Information Literature

The Meningitis Trust produces a range of clear and concise information literature which is available free, including:

- Wallet-sized cards showing the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia
- Leaflets giving general information about meningitis
- Leaflets explaining the after-effects of meningitis and the support available from the Meningitis Trust
- Posters featuring the signs and symptoms of meningitis
- Posters displaying the Meningitis Trust 24-hour helpline number.

Visit our website at www.meningitis-trust.org for full details of the meningitis information leaflets, posters and online resources you can download / order online.

Employers can raise awareness of meningitis in the workplace by displaying signs and symptoms posters on notice boards, or by distributing signs and symptoms cards within wage slips.

24-hour nurse-led helpline (0800 028 18 28)

The Meningitis Trust's helpline is available 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. Led by specially trained nurses it offers information and support in over 100 languages. The helpline is also the gateway to all the other support services the Meningitis Trust provides to people who have been affected by the disease.

If you or your employees have any queries or concerns about meningitis you should call the helpline. To facilitate this you may wish to inform your employees of the helpline number. One way of doing this is by displaying the Meningitis Trust's helpline posters on internal notice boards.

One-to-one Contacts

An employee affected by meningitis may benefit from talking to someone who shares an experience of the disease similar to their own. The Meningitis Trust provides a one-to-one contact service to put people with similar experiences in touch with each other.
Home Visits

An experience of meningitis can leave sufferers and their families confused and traumatised. An employee who has been affected by the disease may not know what help is available to them.

The Meningitis Trust provides a free home visiting service involving a trained nurse or counsellor. During the visit they will provide detailed information on all of the free support services the Meningitis Trust provides and can identify further ways in which the Trust can help.

Counselling

The Meningitis Trust is committed to providing ongoing support to those affected by meningitis and because the trauma caused by the disease can vary from person to person, we provide tailored support when necessary. Our counselling service provides professional support to anyone directly or indirectly affected by meningitis anywhere in the UK and Ireland. We offer counselling free, in a confidential and safe environment.

Financial Grants

Meningitis can have a devastating impact on people’s lives, which is why the Meningitis Trust offers financial support as well as emotional support. The Meningitis Trust provides discretionary financial support grants to enhance the quality of life for people who have been affected by meningitis. Grants are available for a variety of needs including special equipment and aids; therapeutic activities; respite care; re-education; special training; travel and accommodation costs, and much more.

To speak to someone locally about meningitis, please call the Meningitis Trust on the numbers below or email info@meningitis-trust.org

England
Tel: 01453 769027
Fax: 01453 768001

Scotland
Tel/Fax: 0845 120 2123

Wales
Tel/fax: 0845 120 4597

Northern Ireland
Tel/Fax: 0845 120 0663

Republic of Ireland
Tel/Fax: 09064 50531
HOW YOU CAN HELP THE MENINGITIS TRUST

Our work in helping everyone who is coping with the impact of meningitis and raising awareness of this devastating disease is funded almost entirely through support from individuals and organisations in the community, including a number of different companies.

Companies are increasingly working with charities to maximise the benefit of their team building, training and staff motivation programmes. They recognise the value of associating with a charity to raise profile and enhance reputation with key stakeholders. That is why we have developed a programme of activities to help achieve these objectives whilst raising funds for the Meningitis Trust at the same time.

It includes:

- A range of challenge events and other activities that encourage team building and personal development
- Programmes to help individual employees achieve success by participating in marathons, half marathons and a host of other running, walking and cycling events
- A variety of fundraising activities designed to encourage interdepartmental communication, raise morale and add fun to the daily work routine. These include our ‘Coffee Break’ initiative and pin badge campaigns. Additionally, we can provide fundraising materials including balloons, collection tins and T-shirts to support any events that you would like to organise at your workplace. These could range from ‘dress down’ days and quizzes to sponsored car washes and golf days
- Setting up a payroll giving scheme (Give as You Earn) is an easy and inexpensive way for your company to make a positive contribution to the community. There is no administration charge and your company can get a deduction against your profits for any costs. ‘Match’ donations by employees and your company can deduct them from your profits before tax
- Short-term or longer-term ‘Charity of the Year’ partnerships.
- PR support to publicise your company involvement with the Meningitis Trust

Our Corporate Fundraising team is experienced in providing ideas, support and materials for everything from one-off activities to sustained bespoke campaigns. To find out more about the many ways in which we can work together and to request a free leaflet that profiles how different companies have supported the Trust, please contact:

Ella Constable on 01453 768000 or ellac@meningitis-trust.org

Together we can fight the impact of meningitis