

Media Tips

During Meningitis Awareness Week (21-27 September 2009) the Foundation's aim is to raise awareness of the meningitis in babies.

This year the Foundation will focus on the burden of the disease in babies under 12 months of age. Over 1000 babies in the UK alone (over 1200 for UK and ROI)

Although anyone of any age can get meningitis and septicaemia half of all cases in the UK are in the under fives with teenagers and young adults being in the second most at risk group (14-24 year olds).

There is no universal vaccine for all strains of meningitis. Vaccines provide protection against some strains but there is no vaccine for meningococcal group B (MenB) which causes 60% of cases in the UK. A vaccine to protect against MenB disease is currently in development but still a number of years away.

It's important to remember that the childhood vaccination schedule doesn't begin until a baby is two months old, and isn't complete until 13 months old so during this time in particular parents must be extra-vigilant for the symptoms of meningitis.

There are no vaccines for other forms of neonatal meningitis to which babies are more prone and therefore it is vital that parents know the symptoms.

Your experience - The media will not doubt ask why you are supporting Meningitis Awareness Week. Please give your own personal reasons.

Helpline number and website – Space and time is always at a premium in newspapers and on radio and TV so you may not be able to get all the symptoms in. However, please try to get in the helpline number together with the following phrase as it will ensure many more people get access to potentially life-saving information:

“For your free **B Aware** symptoms information pack call Meningitis Research Foundation's **Freephone** 24 hour helpline – **080 8800 3344** – or log onto the website – www.meningitis.org”

Photographs - The newspaper may wish to take photos to go with the article. If it is possible to get posters in the background or be holding up a leaflet, it will give the reader an idea of what they might expect to receive in their free pack.

Meningitis has not gone away - Many people now think that because their children have had vaccines to protect them against meningitis and septicaemia, these diseases are a thing of the past. From the statistics below, it is clear that these are not diseases of the past. Awareness of the symptoms is as important as it has ever been.

The statistics - Anyone of any age can contract meningitis and septicaemia, but those at highest risk are babies under one:

- Babies under 12 months of age run a 38 times higher risk of meningitis than children over one and adults.
- Over 1000 babies under one become ill with meningitis every year in the UK
- One in 10 babies who develop meningitis die and one in four are left with after-effects sometimes as severe as deafness, brain damage and amputations

The speed - Meningitis and septicaemia can progress with frightening speed. Within hours of the first symptoms a previously healthy baby could be in intensive care fighting for their life. It is really important for people to know the symptoms so they can recognise them as quickly as possible and seek medical attention immediately.

Awareness of the symptoms really does save lives - The Foundation is constantly contacted by parents and others who have diagnosed meningitis and septicaemia using the charity's symptoms literature. Meningitis Babywatch is a great resource for new parents to keep on their fridge and refer to if in doubt. Our new symptoms information text messaging service – simply **text MRF to 82088** – provides symptoms directly to your mobile phone.

Information available for everyone - The Foundation believes that information on meningitis and septicaemia should be made available to as many people as possible. The media may be interested to know that symptoms information is available in 22 languages on our website – www.meningitis.org - and that via the helpline – **080 8800 3344** - we can provide an interpretation service in 120 languages.

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