Meningococcal disease

Sporadic cases of meningococcal disease continue to be reported across the country, but as yet there has been no noticeable seasonal increase of laboratory-confirmed cases as reported to the Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis (CRDM), National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD). Meningococcal cases are expected to increase during June and July, and to peak during the months of August to October.

By the end of epidemiological week 12 (week ending 24 March 2013), a total of 21 laboratory-confirmed cases was reported to the CRDM, NICD (Table). Seven cases have been reported in children <1 year of age this year so far; this is half the number of cases for the equivalent time period and age group compared to 2012 (n=14).

The reported cases have diverse serogroups, which is in keeping with sporadic endemic disease in the country. Serogroup data were available for 11/21 (52%) of cases. Serogroup B and W135 have been identified most commonly this year (4/11, 36% serogroup B and 6/11, 55% serogroup W135). The only other serogroup identified was serogroup C (1 case) and one case was non-groupable.

Meningococcal disease occurs throughout the year, but the incidence is highest in the late winter and early spring. Clinicians should have a high index of suspicion for meningococcal disease in patients who present with nonspecific early signs and symptoms. Disease typically has a rapid progression and should be managed as a medical emergency in order to reduce morbidity and mortality. All cases of suspected meningococcal disease (meningitis and sepsis) should be notified telephonically to the Department of Health.

Table: Number of laboratory-confirmed meningococcal disease cases reported until end of week 12, 2012 and 2013, by province

Province	Year	
	2012	**2013**
Eastern Cape	5	4
Free State	0	1
Gauteng	14	4
KwaZulu-Natal	8	3
Limpopo	1	1
Mpumalanga	0	1
Northern Cape	0	1
North West	1	0
Western Cape	8	6
Total	**37**	**21**

Source: Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis, NICD-NHLS