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Meningococcal disease

As is expected during the meningococcal season, cases of meningococcal disease continued to be reported from across the country. Numbers reported in September thus far are lower than weekly case numbers seen in July and August; there are, however, inherent delays in laboratory-based reporting, which lags behind clinical reports.

By epidemiological week 33 (week ending 18 August 2013), a total of 123 laboratory-confirmed cases was reported to the Centre for Respiratory Diseases and Meningitis (CRDM), NICD-NHLS (Table). Twenty-eight (25% of patients with known age) cases have been reported in the <1 year old age group this year so far; this is lower than the number of cases for the equivalent time period and age group in 2012 (n=38, 29%).

The reported cases were caused by diverse serogroups, which is in keeping with sporadic endemic disease in the country. Serogroup data were available for 84/123 (68%) of cases. Serogroup B and W135 have been identified most commonly this year (22/84, 26% serogroup B and 40/84, 48% serogroup W135). There were also fifteen cases of serogroup Y and seven cases of serogroup C disease. Two isolates were 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 an acute febrile illness and 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 epidemiologic week 33 (mid-August), 2012 and 2013, by province

Province	Year	
	2012	2013
Eastern Cape	21	27
Free State	6	8
Gauteng	50	28
KwaZulu-Natal	15	23
Limpopo	2	1
Mpumalanga	3	2
Northern Cape	0	1
North West	6	4
Western Cape	33	29
	136	123

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