**Scoil Chéile Chríost Rathmore NS**

**Meningitis**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

There has been a case of bacterial meningitis within your child’s classroom and your child may have been exposed.

**What is Meningitis?**

Meningitis (sometimes called spinal meningitis) is an infection of the delicate linings (the meninges) that cover the brain and of the fluid contained within these linings (the cerebrospinal fluid or CSF). It can be caused by bacteria or by any of a number of viruses. Bacterial Meningitis is a very serious and potentially lethal condition which requires urgent medical attention whereas viral meningitis is a self-limited illness that will get better by itself.

**What causes Bacterial Meningitis?**

In children, bacterial meningitis is usually caused by one of 3 bacteria: Haemophilus influenze (Hib), the pneumococcus, and the meningococcus. Each of these bacteria can also cause other serious infections such as sppticaemia (blood poisoning), pneumonia, septic arthritis, etc. hib infection generally occurs in children less than 5 years of age, thus in school children it is the meningococcus and the pneumococcus which are the most common culprits. Individuals who have been in close personal contact or who have shared breathing space with someone who develops meningitis that is caused by either the Hib bacteria or the meningococcus are at risk of developing infection. There is a medicine available (rifampin) which can reduce the risk.

**What are the symptoms of Bacterial Meningitis?**

The early symptoms of meningitis are the same regardless of whether it is caused by a bacteria (the more serious from that needs urgent medical attention), or by a virus (the type that will get better by itself). Symptoms often develop quite suddenly with fever, chills, severe headache and vomiting. The head hurts on movement and any attempt to bend the neck is very uncomfortable. The patient may complain of light hurting their eyes. A rash often accompanies meningococcal infection.

**What should I do now?**

If you child has been in close contact with a child with meningocccal infection, the Area Medical Officer may recommend that he/she take a short course of an antibiotic (Rifampin) to reduce the risk of infection. Children less than 5 years of age who have not received the Hib vaccine and who have been in close contact with the Hib injection may need to take Rifampin. Contact your own doctor to discuss these issues.

Let your doctor know that the child has been in contact with meningitis.

If you child develops any illnesses with fever within the next weeks, bring them to the Doctor for examination and remind the doctor that there was meningitis in the school.

**What should I do if I suspect Meningitis in my child?**

If, at any stage your child develops any of the symptoms of meningitis contact your doctor immediately. If there is any delay in reaching your doctor, bring them to Casualty Department of the nearest Children’s Hospital.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Your family doctor and local health clinic will be able to answer any further questions that you might have about Meningitis.

Yours sincerely,

Robbie Jameson,
Principal.