

# WEST AFRICAN RESCUE ASSOCIATION

## **MENINGITIS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

### **THE DISEASE**

Meningitis is an infection of the meninges, the thin lining that surrounds the brain and the spinal cord. It is usually caused by a virus or bacterium (meningococcus).

### **TRANSMISSION**

It is transmitted from person-to-person through droplets of respiratory or throat secretions from carriers. Close and prolonged contact – such as kissing, sneezing or coughing on someone, or living in close quarters with an infected person – facilitates the spread of the disease.

### **INCUBATION**

The average incubation period is four days, but can range between two and 10 days. The seasonal peak period of meningitis outbreaks is between December and June when the weather is dry, windy and dusty.

### **SYMPTOMS**

The most common symptoms are a stiff neck, high fever, sensitivity to light, confusion, headaches, nausea and vomiting. Bacterial meningitis may result in brain damage, hearing loss or a learning disability in 10% to 20% of survivors.

### **FACTS**

More than one million cases of meningitis have been reported in Africa since 1998. Ghana and other Sub Saharan countries have been experiencing explosive and repeated meningococcal epidemics for more than a hundred years. Group A meningococcus is the main cause of meningitis epidemics and accounts for an estimated 80% to 85% of all cases. These deadly epidemics occur in the 25 countries of the "meningitis belt". Ghana is one of these countries.

## PREVENTION



In the “African Meningitis Belt”, Meningitis vaccine is recommended to protect against the epidemic disease. Travelers are reminded of the importance of keeping their vaccination status up to date.

In December 2010, a new Meningococcal A conjugate vaccine was introduced nationwide in Africa. This year, the vaccine was introduced, in campaign mode in the northern sector of Ghana. The campaign has targeted all persons from the age of 1 to 29 years.