

MENINGITIS

What is meningitis?	Meningitis is an infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by germs called <i>bacteria</i> (e.g. <i>meningococcal meningitis</i>) or by germs called <i>viruses</i> (<i>viral meningitis</i>). Most cases of meningitis are caused by a virus and are relatively mild. On the other hand, meningitis caused by bacteria is a serious infection.
How common is meningitis?	There are seasonal outbreaks of bacterial meningitis (especially in sub-Saharan Africa), but viral meningitis is the commonest form.
How will you know if a learner has meningitis?	The learner will have an acute illness with symptoms that may appear in any order, including high fever, neck stiffness, nausea and vomiting, headache, rash (pinpoints, red spots), confusion and fits.
How do you get meningitis?	Direct and indirect contact with fresh nose or throat discharge (respiratory droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person's coughing and sneezing).
Once you are infected (once the germ is in your body), how long does it take before you start feeling sick?	It can take 1 to 10 days; usually 3-4 days.
How does one treat meningitis?	If the teacher suspects meningitis, he or she must refer the learner to a doctor, clinic or hospital. If the learner has a <i>bacterial</i> meningitis, he or she will be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics are not needed for <i>viral</i> meningitis, but the learner will need to rest and take painkillers such as paracetamol (e.g. Panado). The symptoms of viral meningitis usually clear up within two weeks.
Does a learner with meningitis need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with meningitis be excluded from school?	For 24 hours after start of treatment. The learner may return to school only with a doctor's letter.
What complications can one get from having meningitis?	Delay in the treatment of bacterial meningitis can lead to permanent brain damage and this can lead to learning difficulties and paralysis. Other complications include deafness, skin scarring, and loss of limbs due to failure of the circulation.
Remarks:	Prompt treatment by doctor is very important. Report cases to the Health Department immediately. To prevent spreading of the disease, antibiotics may be given to persons who have had contact with meningitis cases. <i>Meningococcal meningitis</i> is most contagious and is the form that presents with a rash. It can result in death.

CHICKEN POX

What is chicken pox?	Chicken pox is a disease caused by a very small germ called a virus (<i>varicella virus</i>), which cannot be seen with the naked eye.
How common is chicken pox?	Chicken pox occurs mainly in children, but can occur in adults.
How will you know if a learner has chicken pox?	The learner will have an itchy rash, which appears mostly on the chest, back and face (even on the gums). The rash appears in crops every few days. It starts as red spots, then becomes fluid-filled blisters (which may become filled with pus). They then dry to form crusts or scabs. The rash lasts for 8 to 10 days. The learner may also have a fever, headache and complain of tiredness and body pains.
How do you get chicken pox?	Chicken pox is highly contagious, and is spread when an infected child coughs or sneezes, passing on the germ to other children. One may also get chicken pox if one comes into direct contact with the fluid from the blisters.
Once you are infected (once the germ is in your body), how long does it take before you start feeling sick?	The germ may be in your body for 10 to 21 days before you start feeling sick.
How does one treat chicken pox?	If chicken pox is suspected, the child must be seen by a doctor. The child can be given paracetamol (e.g. Panado) for the fever, and calamine lotion can be applied to the rash to reduce the itch. If the chicken pox is severe or if it has become infected, the doctor may prescribe tablets for the itch and an antibiotic.
Does a learner with chicken pox need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with chicken pox be excluded from school?	A learner with chicken pox needs to be kept at home and treated by a doctor. The learner may return to school only with a letter from the doctor.
What complications can one get from having chicken pox?	The rash may become infected, therefore it is important to prevent scratching. It may also affect your lungs, brain and bloodstream.
Remarks:	Immunisation is available. It is not available at clinics, but can be done at a pharmacy.

HEAD LICE

What are head lice?	Lice are tiny (1/2-3mm long) wingless parasitic insects that depend on humans for their survival. They have hairy, flattened bodies, and claws for attaching themselves to the scalp. They live close to the skin for warmth and feed by sucking tiny amounts of blood from the scalp. The female louse lays her eggs (called nits), which stick firmly to the hair shaft. The nits look like small white grains.
How common are head lice?	Lice are a common problem among children. Females are more likely to be affected. Cleanliness and hygiene have very little to do with the presence of lice (although the unsanitary conditions found in poor and overcrowded areas do make lice spread more easily). In spite of regular washing of hair, lice can still appear. In fact, the head louse thrives in clean, well-washed hair.
How will you know if a learner has head lice?	The learner's scalp may be extremely itchy. (However, lice do not cause any itching for up to three months after a person has become infested.) He or she may also have a red rash on the back of the neck, or you may see the actual lice or nits on the hair shafts. The most common body area affected is the back of the ear.
How does one get lice?	Lice can walk from head to head if they are in direct contact, but they cannot swim, fly, hop or jump. They can also move from someone's head on to a surface, such as a pillow or cap, and from there on to someone else's head.
How long does it take before the eggs (or nits) hatch?	7 to 10 days after being laid.
How does one treat head lice?	To get rid of the lice wash hair with a special shampoo from the chemist (e.g. Quellada or Gambex). Remaining nits should be removed with a fine-tooth comb and rinsed with warm vinegar water. In 10 days' time check the hair again, and repeat shampoo and removal of nits. (See attached form letters to parents.)
Does a learner with head lice need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with lice be excluded from school?	A learner with lice needs to be kept at home <i>until treatment has started</i> . Once treatment has started (even if nits are still present) the learner can be allowed back to school, as long as hair checks and removal of nits continues. Studies have shown that not all nits develop into lice, so it is unnecessary to exclude a learner from school if he or she has nits only.
What complications can one get from having head lice?	Lice rarely cause physical health problems, although scratching of the scalp can lead to infection. The biggest problem with lice is that entire families, households and schools may become infested.
Remarks:	All parents or guardians should be alerted to the presence of a lice infestation within the school, and should be requested to check their children regularly. (Examples of suitable letters are attached.)

MEASLES

What is measles?	A very infectious disease caused by a very small germ called the measles virus.
How common is measles?	In the past most children under 5 years suffered from measles at one time or another. But, because many children are now immunised against measles, it has become less common.
How will you know if a learner has measles?	Measles is characterized by a high fever and a blotchy red rash all over the body. Symptoms also include a cough, watery eyes that are sore in bright light and a runny nose.
How do you get measles?	Measles is spread from one person to another by droplet spread, e.g. coughing and sneezing. Having contact with the infected person's nose or throat secretions may also spread it. Children are usually most infectious before a diagnosis is made.
Once you are infected (once the germ is in your body), how long does it take before you feel sick or show symptoms?	It may take between 7 and 14 days.
How does one treat measles?	If measles is suspected in a child, he or she must be seen by a doctor. Paracetamol (e.g. Panado) may be given for the high fever. Sometimes a doctor may prescribe a Vitamin A supplement to prevent complications. Children with measles should be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids.
Does a learner with measles need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with measles be excluded from school?	For 7 days after the appearance of rash.
What complications can one get from having measles?	Chest infection (pneumonia), middle ear infection, diarrhoea, severe sores in mouth, and a type of eye infection which may lead to partial blindness.
Remarks:	Measles is a serious disease that may lead to death. However, it can be prevented or minimized by immunisation (pre-school cards should be checked by teachers). It is important that parents are encouraged to fully immunise their child before starting school.

SCABIES

What is scabies?	It is a small organism or mite that burrows under the skin and lays eggs. These eggs hatch after a few days and more eggs are laid. This cycle continues and may spread over the whole body.
How common is scabies?	Scabies is more common where living conditions are overcrowded and regular bathing is not possible. It spreads where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people, such as in hospitals, day-care centres, schools, etc. Both children and adults can get scabies. Elderly people or those with a weak immune system are usually more at risk of contracting scabies.
How will you know if a learner has scabies?	Small red spots or burrows are found on the body. They occur in folds of skin, between fingers, at the waistline, etc. This may, however, spread to the rest of the body. Severe itching is experienced, especially at night or when conditions are warm.
How do you get scabies?	It is passed from one person to another by direct, usually prolonged, skin-to-skin contact or by sharing clothes, bed linen, gloves, caps, hats, etc. A handshake or hug will usually not be enough contact to spread the infestation.
Once you are infected (once the germ is in your body), how long does it take before you feel ill or show symptoms?	From a few days up to a few weeks.
How does one treat scabies?	If scabies is suspected, the learner should see a doctor for the prescription of lotions. (See Appendix A for application of lotions.)
Does a learner with scabies need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with scabies be excluded from school?	For 24 hours after start of treatment.
What complications can one get from having scabies?	Because the skin has been broken, secondary infection often occurs. (That means that the damaged skin becomes infected by another germ as well.) This should be treated by a health professional.
Remarks:	Scabies should not be self-diagnosed and self-treated. It can often be mistaken for another skin infection or illness and should therefore be diagnosed by a doctor, nurse or trained health professional. Schools are, therefore advised to use the attached letter with care, and only if all other conditions have been ruled out.

MUMPS

What is mumps?	An infectious disease caused by a small germ called a virus (the mumps virus).
How will you know if a learner has mumps?	The learner will normally have a fever with swelling and tenderness of one or more of the salivary glands (the glands in front of the ear).
How do you get mumps?	The germ is spread from one person to another by droplet infection, e.g. coughing and sneezing or by other contact with the saliva of an infected person.
Once you are infected (once the germ is in your body), how long does it take before you feel sick or show symptoms?	It may take between 14 and 21 days.
How does one treat mumps?	<p>If mumps is suspected in a learner, he or she must be taken to a doctor. Pain medication may be given for the fever and pain.</p> <p>It is important to encourage good oral hygiene.</p> <p>In some cases the swelling may be so severe and painful that child with mumps can take only a fluid diet for a few days. Always encourage the intake of enough fluids.</p>
Does a learner with mumps need to be excluded from school?	Yes.
For how long should a learner with mumps be excluded from school ?	For 7 to 9 days after the appearance of swelling. He or she may return only with a doctor's certificate.
What complications can one get from having mumps?	Inflammation of certain parts of the brain as well as deafness. The testes or ovaries may be involved, causing significant pain. However, this is not common in children who have not yet reached puberty.
Remarks:	Having children immunised can prevent mumps. Parents should be encouraged to fully immunise their child before entering the school system. Immunisation is not available at clinics, but can be obtained at a pharmacy.

Appendix A:

FORM LETTER FOR PARENTS OF CHILD WITH SCABIES

Dear Parent/Guardian

It is noted with concern that your child _____ has a number of small red spots or burrows on his/her body, which MAY be scabies.

To protect your child and other children from further infection, you are requested to take your child to your family doctor or health clinic for a medical examination.

Should your child have scabies, a lotion will be prescribed and you are then requested to do the following:

1. Keep him or her at home until 24 hours after you have started the treatment with the lotion.
2. Cut your child's fingernails.
3. Wash all of your child's clothes and bed linen in hot water and allow to dry in direct sunlight for about 8 hours. If possible, iron all clothes with hot iron.
4. The whole body must be washed with soap and warm water. Dry well with a clean towel.
5. Apply lotion (prescribed by clinic or doctor) to the whole body, except to face and neck area. Make sure the solution gets into all the skin folds. Allow to dry on skin. Reapply lotion. Leave lotion on body for 24 hours and then wash off. If the itchiness does not go away within 3 days of this treatment, the process (steps 3 to 5 above) should be repeated.
6. Everyone living in the same house or in close contact should also be treated.

Your co-operation will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Class Teacher

Date

Appendix B:

FORM LETTER FOR PARENTS OF CHILD WITH LICE

Dear Parent/Guardian

On examination at school, we have found that your child _____
has lice and nits in his/her hair.

Please do the following:

1. Keep him/her at home until you have started treatment.
2. Wash the hair with special shampoo e.g. Quellada or Gambex, which are available at your local pharmacy, community health centre (day hospital) or clinic. This will kill the lice.
3. After washing the hair, nits can be removed with a fine-tooth comb or with tweezers. Run the comb through the hair, starting at the ends of the hair and ending at the roots, and angling the teeth towards the scalp. Inspect the teeth of the comb after each stroke – anything small, grey and moving is a louse. Rinse the comb under running water before the next stroke.
4. If any nits or lice remain on the following day, rinse the hair with vinegar water (a solution made of ½ vinegar and ½ warm water).
5. Continue to comb the hair with a fine-tooth comb until no nits remain.
6. Ten days after you have shampooed the hair, wash the hair once more with the special shampoo.
7. Everybody in the family or household who is infested must be treated.
8. Do not use a hairdryer after using the special shampoo.
9. Do not share combs, brushes, towels or headgear.
10. Vacuum the house thoroughly to remove any hairs which may have nits attached to them.
11. Wash all clothes (especially headgear) and bedding in hot water.

Your co-operation will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Class Teacher

Date

Annexure C: FORM LETTER FOR PARENTS
NOTIFYING OF LICE INFESTATION

Dear Parent/Guardian

A number of learners at our school are infested with lice. These learners will not be allowed at school until treatment has started.

In order to prevent the infestation spreading, please do the following:

1. Brush your child's hair at least daily.
2. Ensure that your child's hair is worn close to the head, e.g. braided.
3. Check daily for head lice.
4. Notify the school if you detect head lice.
5. If your child has lice, keep him or her at home until you have started treatment.

Your co-operation will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Class Teacher

Date