



*For Immediate Release
Monday 20th August 2012*

Website Launches to Spread the Word About Meningitis Symptoms

New Zealanders concerned about meningitis now have a place to turn for information with the launch of The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand website – www.meningitis.org.nz.

“Meningitis is difficult to diagnose as it presents with flu-like symptoms, but can often strike and progress quickly. If it is not diagnosed early and treated effectively, it can result in death, deafness, loss of limbs, brain damage or other neurological disabilities,” says Paul Gilberd, board member and spokesperson, The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Meningitis Foundation website www.meningitis.org.nz is an important tool in educating Kiwis about the symptoms of meningitis, the need to urgently seek medical assistance if meningitis is suspected and the importance of vaccinating against this deadly disease.

Meningitis is the inflammation of the meninges (the membrane lining of the brain and spinal cord). It can sometimes develop in a matter of hours and can be deadly. Most cases of meningitis start with a high fever, severe headache and stiff neck, often followed by vomiting and drowsiness. Some people experience discomfort when looking at bright lights and in some cases a rash may appear.

“Winter is the peak period for meningitis infections and there is relatively low awareness of prevention strategies and disease symptoms,” says Paul Gilberd. “We wanted to provide easy access to information; where people could learn about meningitis, understand the preventative role of vaccinations, and to know what symptoms to look out for.

“The website also serves as a place for individuals and families affected by meningitis to share their experiences. We recognise the affect that meningitis can have on a family and know that having accurate information can help people to cope when a loved one is ill. It can also provide support during what can be a long journey back to health,” adds Paul Gilberd.

To mark the website launch, The Meningitis Foundation is bringing together medical professionals for a **Winter Wellness Workshop on Tuesday 21st August at Auckland’s Middlemore Hospital**. Winter sees a spike in the diagnosis of meningitis and deaths caused by this disease.

“People need to be reminded of the vital message ‘**Don’t swap spit**,’” says Paul Gilberd. “In practical terms this means don’t share drink bottles, cigarettes, spoons or straws. This disease, like many others, is spread through the transfer of warm saliva. With winter coughs and colds, and lots of people all together indoors, this is the most dangerous time of year. Together we must remain vigilant.

“Meningitis is preventable,” adds Paul Gilberd. “Through the website The Meningitis Foundation aims to raise awareness of the symptoms of this disease, and ultimately save lives.”

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For further information, or to arrange an interview please contact Andrea Brady on 021 977 688 or andrea@catalystcommunication.co.nz.

About The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand

The Meningitis Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand strives to educate New Zealanders and raise their awareness of meningitis (including meningococcal disease and pneumococcal meningitis); promoting prevention and control. The Foundation is involved in awareness-raising and education activities within the community, and with health and education professionals. The scope of the work is centred on communication and advocacy, with a firm focus on improving access to vaccines in order to save lives. www.meningitis.org.nz