MENINGOCOCCAL AND SMOKING - RISK

**SmokeFree Tasmania has urged people to quit smoking if they are primary carers of small children, because of the risk of invasive meningococcal disease. As a first step all Tasmanian children and adolescents should be vaccinated.**

“*Children in contact with smokers are at greater risk of contracting invasive meningococcal disease, and should be vaccinated urgently”,* Dr. Nick Towle, Spokesman for SmokeFree Tasmania said.

[Dr. Norman Swan on](http://www.abc.net.au/health/minutes/stories/2004/09/30/1208799.htm) the ABC said:

*“…the most potent factor was having a carer who smoked.*

*The link wasn't the smoke in the air, as you might have thought. It looks as though people who smoke have damaged airways, which are more likely to carry the meningococcal germ.*

*So smokers are more likely to be harbouring the bug - not something that taking your cigarette outside can change.*

*Another reason to quit.”*

“*We also urge the government to conduct targeted campaigns in late winter and early spring, as recommended by clinicians and experts from Queensland*” Dr. Towle said.

The Tasmanian Government has a [Fact](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/infectious_diseases/meningococcal_disease) Sheet available online regarding meningococcal disease.

Information about free [vaccination](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/immunisation/school_based_immunisation_program/meningococcal_w) for 15-19 year old teenagers is also [online](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/immunisation/school_based_immunisation_program/meningococcal_w/meningococcal_w_vaccination_program_-_general_facts).

The [Journal Internal Medicine by Queensland](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1445-5994.2004.00564.x/full) experts indicated

*“….. an established association between risk of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) and exposure to cigarette smoke and highlights the risk to young children from primary caregiver smoking. The risk of IMD in young children could be further reduced if primary caregivers did not smoke.*

*There is an opportunity to use this message in targeted antismoking campaigns. Such campaigns might have more impact during peak periods of IMD (late winter/early spring).”*

**“Vaccination of children and teenagers against meningococcal disease is the primary recommendation, though this government needs to reconsider stronger measures to reduce the uptake of smoking, and continue sufficient funding to help parents and caregivers to quit smoking”. Dr. Towle said.**

**SmokeFree Tasmania Contacts: Dr. Nick Towle 0428 834 748.** Dr. Kathryn Barnsley (0411 261 201), Dr. Harley Stanton (0418 344 703)