

NATIONAL STANDARD METHOD

UNDER CONSULTATION
**SCREENING FOR
MENINGOCOCCI**

BSOP 51

Issued by Standards Unit, Evaluations and Standards Laboratory
Centre for Infections



Association of Medical Microbiologists
Association of Medical Microbiologists



SCREENING FOR MENINGOCOCCI

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STATUS OF NATIONAL STANDARD METHODS

National Standard Methods, which include standard operating procedures (SOPs), algorithms and guidance notes, promote high quality practices and help to assure the comparability of diagnostic information obtained in different laboratories. This in turn facilitates standardisation of surveillance underpinned by research, development and audit and promotes public health and patient confidence in their healthcare services. The methods are well referenced and represent a good minimum standard for clinical and public health microbiology. However, in using National Standard Methods, laboratories should take account of local requirements and may need to undertake additional investigations. The methods also provide a reference point for method development.

National Standard Methods are developed, reviewed and updated through an open and wide consultation process where the views of all participants are considered and the resulting documents reflect the majority agreement of contributors.

Representatives of several professional organisations, including those whose logos appear on the front cover, are members of the working groups which develop National Standard Methods. Inclusion of an organisation's logo on the front cover implies support for the objectives and process of preparing standard methods. The representatives participate in the development of the National Standard Methods but their views are not necessarily those of the entire organisation of which they are a member. The current list of participating organisations can be obtained by emailing standards@hpa.org.uk.

The performance of standard methods depends on the quality of reagents, equipment, commercial and in-house test procedures. Laboratories should ensure that these have been validated and shown to be fit for purpose. Internal and external quality assurance procedures should also be in place.

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The HPA aims to be a fully Caldicott compliant organisation. It seeks to take every possible precaution to prevent unauthorised disclosure of patient details and to ensure that patient-related records are kept under secure conditions¹.

More details can be found on the website at www.evaluations-standards.org.uk. Contributions to the development of the documents can be made by contacting standards@hpa.org.uk.

The reader is informed that all taxonomy in this document was correct at time of issue or re-issue.

Please note the references are now formatted using Reference Manager software. If you alter or delete text without Reference Manager installed on your computer, the references will not be updated automatically.

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AMENDMENT PROCEDURE

Controlled document reference	BSOP 51
Controlled document title	Screening for meningococci

Each National Standard Method has an individual record of amendments. The current amendments are listed on this page. The amendment history is available from standards@hpa.org.uk.

On issue of revised or new pages each controlled document should be updated by the copyholder in the laboratory.

Amendment Number/ Date	Issue no. Discarded	Insert Issue no.	Page	Section(s) involved	Amendment
1/ 03.05.05	1	1.1	1	Front page	Redesigned
			2	Status of document	Reworded
			4	Amendment page	Redesigned

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SCREENING FOR MENINGOCOCCI

Types of specimens: Naso and pernasal, oropharyngeal and pernasal swabs

SCOPE OF DOCUMENT

This National Standard Method (NSM) describes the investigation of specimens for screening for *Neisseria meningitidis* for the diagnosis of cases of meningococcal disease. It may be used for the screening of contacts after discussion with the local CCDCS/reference expert.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of cases of meningococcal disease which occur in the UK are sporadic. Close contacts of a case are recognised to be at increased risk of infection. The source of infection of the case and of further cases that might appear in contacts is likely to be a carrier who is one of these close contacts. To prevent onward transmission of virulent meningococci, prophylaxis (antibiotic chemoprophylaxis and vaccination if appropriate) is recommended for such contacts. The aim is to eliminate carriage of the virulent organism from the case's immediate social network. Swabs for the detection of meningococcal carriage are generally limited to those used for diagnostic purposes, eg in the investigation of a case of suspected meningococcal disease, or screening swabs collected in the investigation of contacts of a case, or in an outbreak to determine the extent of carriage and/or the need for prophylaxis.

Characterisation of the organism producing disease is an important consideration in outbreak management as it determines whether cases may be related and if vaccination of contacts might be necessary. The increasing use of intravenous antibiotics in the community prior to hospital admission and the confirmation of cases by molecular (non culture) methods does not provide isolates for typing and determination of antimicrobial susceptibilities. This may increase the need for isolation of the organism from diagnostic or screening swabs from cases and close contacts. Typing is important for surveillance of the national Group C meningococcal vaccination programme and for detection of vaccine failures.

Carriage

N. meningitidis is carried on the posterior pharyngeal wall and can be detected from pernasal or oropharyngeal swabs. Specimens for meningococcal screening are from two types of individuals: those infected and who may have been treated with penicillin; and untreated asymptomatic contacts of the index case. Oropharyngeal swabs (sampling the posterior pharyngeal wall through the mouth) are ideal, but per-nasal swabs are also acceptable where patients may be unable to cooperate. Carriage precedes invasive infection and can be detected in up to 50% clinical cases. Detection of carriage is less affected by parenteral penicillin being given prior to sampling and can be useful when other cultures from normally sterile sites are negative.

The background carriage rate in the general population has been estimated to be around 10%². Meningococcal carriage is an age-dependent phenomenon, with rate increasing sharply in teenagers, reaching a peak in young adults. Rates of transmission and, consequently, the prevalence of carriage increase in closed and semi-closed populations, for example military recruits and university students and in household contacts. The current policy in England and Wales is to recommend chemoprophylaxis to family/household contacts of a case³. Where there is more than one case the decision on when to extend prophylaxis will be taken by the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control.

Spectrum of disease

Infection with *N. meningitidis* produces a wide spectrum of disease manifestations ranging from a mild illness with transient fever and bacteraemia to fulminant meningococcal sepsis, characterised by a rapidly progressive widespread purpuric skin rash, coagulation defects, septic shock and death within a few hours of onset of symptoms⁴. Other presentations include a predominantly meningitic illness which may or may not be accompanied by a purpuric rash, primary meningococcal arthritis^{5,6}, pneumonia, conjunctivitis⁷ and more rarely sinusitis, endocarditis^{8,9} and necrotising fasciitis.

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Occasionally a more chronic picture may be encountered in association with positive blood cultures often with cutaneous lesions and arthritis.

N. meningitidis may also be isolated from the lower genital tract or rectum in men and women during screening for gonorrhoea and may be implicated in genital tract infections¹⁰. Rare deficiencies of the later stages of the complement and porpedin pathway can predispose to recurrent infections with *Neisseria* species presenting as meningococcal disease¹¹.

Epidemiology

The incidence and case fatality are highest in infants less than one year of age in whom the signs of early infection may be more difficult to detect¹². There is a second but lower peak of infection in the 15-24 year age group. The seasonal peak is in the winter months in the UK.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION/LIMITATIONS

N/A

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1 SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS¹³⁻²⁴

1.1 SPECIMEN COLLECTION

N/A

1.2 SPECIMEN TRANSPORT AND STORAGE

Sealed plastic bag

1.3 SPECIMEN PROCESSING

Containment Level 2

Laboratory procedures that give rise to infectious aerosols must be conducted in a microbiological safety cabinet, isolator or be otherwise suitably contained²⁵

N. meningitidis is in Hazard Group 2 although in some cases the nature of the work may dictate full Containment Level 3 conditions. Suspected isolates of *N. meningitidis* should always be handled in a microbiological safety cabinet²⁶

N. meningitidis causes severe and sometimes fatal disease. Laboratory acquired infections have been reported. The organism infects primarily by the respiratory route. An effective vaccine is available for some meningococcal groups

Refer to current guidance on the safe handling of all organisms documented in this NSM

The above guidance should be supplemented with local COSHH and risk assessments

Compliance with postal and transport regulations is essential

2 SPECIMEN COLLECTION

2.1 OPTIMAL TIME FOR SPECIMEN COLLECTION

Before antimicrobial therapy where possible

2.2 CORRECT SPECIMEN TYPE AND METHOD OF COLLECTION

Naso and pernasal, oropharyngeal and pernasal swabs. Saliva samples should be rejected

3 SPECIMEN TRANSPORT AND STORAGE

3.1 TIME BETWEEN SPECIMEN COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

Specimens should be transported and processed as soon as possible. Recovery of meningococci may be compromised if culture is delayed

3.2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS TO MINIMISE DETERIORATION

Swabs should be transported in Amies transport medium with charcoal

Direct plating, when the swab is taken, should be considered

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4 SPECIMEN PROCESSING

4.1 TEST SELECTION

N/A

4.2 APPEARANCE

N/A

4.3 MICROSCOPY

N/A

4.4 CULTURE AND INVESTIGATION

4.4.1 PRE-TREATMENT

N/A

4.4.2 SPECIMEN PROCESSING

Inoculate each agar plate with swab (see [QSOP 52-Inoculation of culture media](#))

For the isolation of individual colonies, spread inoculum using a sterile loop

4.4.3 CULTURE MEDIA, CONDITIONS AND ORGANISMS FOR ALL SPECIMENS:

Clinical details/ conditions	Standard media	Incubation			Cultures read	Target organism
		Temp°C	Atmos	Time		
Screening for <i>N. meningitidis</i> case or contact	GC selective agar	35-37	5-10% CO ₂	40-48 h	daily	<i>N. meningitidis</i>

4.5 IDENTIFICATION

Minimum level of identification in the laboratory

[N. meningitidis](#) species level

Isolates associated with outbreaks, where epidemiologically indicated and organisms with unusual or unexpected resistance and whenever there is a laboratory or clinical problem or anomaly that requires elucidation should be sent to the appropriate reference laboratory.

4.6 REFERRAL TO REFERENCE LABORATORIES

For information on the tests offered, turn around times, transport procedure and the other requirements of the reference laboratory [click here for user manuals and request forms](#).

N. meningitidis for confirmation of identification, typing and susceptibility testing

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4.7 ANTIMICROBIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY TESTING

Refer to NSM on Susceptibility Testing ([BSOP 45-Susceptibility Testing](#))

5 REPORTING PROCEDURE

5.1 MICROSCOPY

N/A

5.2 CULTURE

Negatives

"*N. meningitidis* not isolated"

Positives

"*N. meningitidis* isolated" and report serogroup if known or state "Further identification to follow"

5.2.1 CULTURE REPORTING TIME

Clinically urgent culture results to be telephoned or sent electronically when available

Interim / final written report, 16 - 72h stating, if appropriate, that a further report will be issued

5.2 ANTIMICROBIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY TESTING

Report susceptibilities as clinically indicated

6 REPORTING TO THE HPA²⁷ (LOCAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND CENTRE FOR INFECTIONS)

Refer to the following:

Individual NSMs on organism identification

Health Protection Agency publications "Laboratory reporting to the Health Protection Agency: Guide for Diagnostic Laboratories"

"Hospital infection control: Guidance on the control of infection in hospitals"

Local Memorandum of Understanding

In cases of suspected meningococcal disease and contacts the isolation of *N. meningitidis* should be reported to the CCDC immediately

Report all isolates of the following: *N. meningitidis*

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7 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACTS

This National Standard Method has been developed, reviewed and revised by the National Standard Methods Working Group for Clinical Bacteriology (http://www.hpa-standardmethods.org.uk/wg_bacteriology.asp). The contributions of many individuals in clinical bacteriology laboratories and specialist organisations who have provided information and comment during the development of this document, and final editing by the Medical Editor are acknowledged.

The National Standard Methods are issued by Standards Unit, Evaluations and Standards Laboratory, Centre for Infections, Health Protection Agency, London.

For further information please contact us at:

Standards Unit
Evaluations and Standards Laboratory
Centre for Infections
Health Protection Agency
Colindale
London
NW9 5EQ

E-mail: standards@hpa.org.uk

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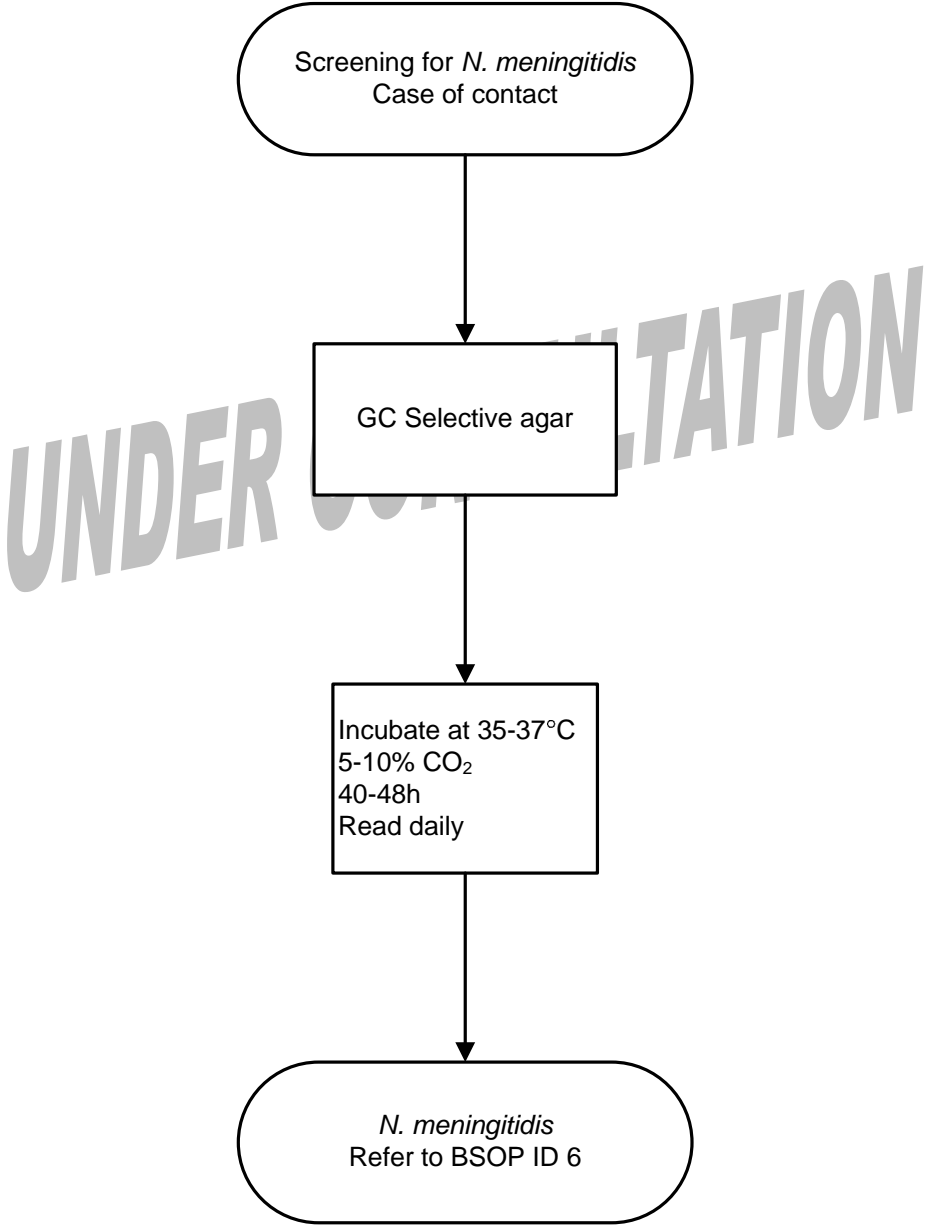
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APPENDIX



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