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Ireland Office:

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Minister for Health  
Department of Health  
Block 1  
Miesian Plaza  
50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street  
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18<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Dear Mr Harris,

I am writing to ask you how the Department of Health is going to respond to the fact that the number of people in Ireland contracting MenW meningitis has more than tripled since 2014?

As you will know, it is a tragedy for someone to die suddenly from a disease like meningitis that is vaccine preventable. What causes particular concern for this disease, especially for parents, is that meningitis strikes quickly and can kill within 12 hours. Those who survive can be left with life-changing complications, including brain injury and damage to limbs that can lead to amputation.

We know that different types of meningitis are a concern in Ireland. Both MenB and MenC meningitis continue to be a threat, and now MenW meningitis is on the rise.

The particularly deadly strain of MenW bacteria that is circulating in Ireland right now is the same strain that has been spreading in much of Europe. It has a very high fatality rate and can be very hard to recognise because patients often have gastrointestinal symptoms, such as vomiting, without the characteristic signs of meningitis and septicaemia, such as non-blanching rash.

Our Ireland team have been in touch with several families who tragically lost children to meningococcal disease, including a recent death from MenW, and we have received many calls to our helpline from worried people.

Some countries, including the UK and Netherlands, have introduced the MenACWY vaccines and vaccinated teenagers to prevent the spread of MenW. This is despite the number of cases being relatively low, because this strain of MenW is so deadly.

An update on your plans as a matter of urgency would be most welcome by me, my team, the families affected and those in the general population who are still at risk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Smith".

Vinny Smith  
Chief Executive  
Meningitis Research Foundation