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Vaccination key to meningococcal disease prevention

THE potentially fatal meningococcal disease can be prevented through vaccination, the Philippine Foundation for Vaccination (PFV) said.

Speaking during the celebration of the World Meningitis Day on April 24, foundation Executive Director Lulu Bravo stressed the importance of educating the public to prevent the spread of meningococemia, as well as to allay the fears of the public so they do not panic.

She explained that meningococcal disease was potentially life-threatening and should always be viewed as a medical emergency, as the disease infects the bloodstream. It is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, the same bacteria that causes meningitis.

She added that the disease could spread easily from person to person through respiratory droplets, which was why those who live in close quarters including dorms, prisons and hospice were most vulnerable.

Bravo cited the case of Baguio City in 2004, where Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center were reported to have admitted daily patients exhibiting meningococemia-like symptoms.

The following year, meningococemia became a full-blown scare that put a damper on city tourism, owing to the little knowledge that the people had about meningococemia then.

With this in mind, Bravo added that the foundation did not want to cause hysteria, but it also did not want Filipinos to be complacent. "Over time we've seen fewer and fewer people getting infected. As a result, people forget to consider meningitis when someone gets really sick so we need to remind everyone about its potential danger."

Meningitis is defined as an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms often include sudden onset of fever, headache and stiff neck, although there are other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light and confusion.