MEDIA RELEASE

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Meningococcal Disease, Another Reason to Quit Smoking

Prof. Robert Booy, Director of Research at the National Centre for Immunisation and Research (NCIRS), at the Kids Research Institute, The Children's Hospital at Westmead, warns that smokers are at increased risk of carrying meningococcal germs and passing it on to their children when they kiss and cuddle them.

“Passive smoking isn’t the only smoking risk to children”, said Prof Booy. “Smokers carry more germs like meningococcus, so normal family cuddles and kisses can pass on dangerous germs, even if smokers only smoke outside. The bacteria are transferred from person to person through secretions from the back of the throat, and smokers are at a higher risk of carrying the disease.

“Most people with children smoke outside, and recent research from the University of Sydney supports this. So parents are aware that passive smoking can lead to increased risk of middle ear infection, SIDS, asthma and other breathing problems in children, but not of the risk of meningococcal disease. This is another good reason for smokers to quit, not just smoke outside”

“Although it’s rare, meningococcal disease can be serious and up to 10 per cent of patients can die,” said Prof Booy. “With the beginning of winter now here, we are now entering the peak season for meningococcal disease. Early detection and treatment can, in the majority of cases, result in a full recovery. In most cases the infection is effectively treated with antibiotics.

“There are a number of meningococcal strains with the two main ones being C and B. For the meningococcal C strain, there is vaccination, however there is currently no vaccine for the B strain of the disease.”

The symptoms of meningococcal disease may include:

- sudden onset of fever
- severe headache
- weakness, drowsiness, confusion or coma
- sore legs or sore joints
- nausea and vomiting
- dislike of bright lights
• rash of red-purple spots and
• a stiff neck.

*Kids Research Institute* is the research arm of *The Children’s Hospital at Westmead*, the largest paediatric centre in NSW, providing the most advanced care and treatment options for children from NSW, Australia and across the Pacific Rim.

Established in 1880, *The Children’s Hospital at Westmead* is a stand-alone public Hospital and registered charity with 3,000 staff working in 150 departments. Over 60,000 sick children and their families are cared for each year in a family-focused, healing environment.

Funded by the NSW Government, *The Children’s Hospital at Westmead* provides significant enhancements to services aided by the generosity of individual and corporate donors. For more information visit [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au)

**Media contact:** Leonie Leonard, Public Relations Manager, The Children’s Hospital at Westmead Tel: 02 9845 3583 a.h 02 9845 0000