

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Bacterial Meningitis

What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial Meningitis is an infection of the fluid around the spinal cord or brain caused by a bacterium.

Many kinds of bacteria may cause meningitis, but the most common are:

- Streptococcus pneumonia (Pneumococcus)
- Neisseria Meningitis (Meningococcus)
- Haemophilus Influenzae (H-Flu or HIB)

Who can get Bacterial Meningitis?

Anyone, at any age can get bacterial meningitis. However,

- Pneumococcus is more common in infants;
- Meningococcus is more common in children, teenagers and young adults;
- H-Flu can occur in infants and children, but is rare because of the HIB vaccine for children.
- Elderly adults or those weakened by illness or medicine.

How do you get Bacterial Meningitis?

By direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Kissing, sharing utensils or drinking glasses can spread the infection.

How long after exposure to the bacteria do symptoms begin?

On average, symptoms occur 1-10 days after

What are the symptoms of Bacterial Meningitis?

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Vomiting/nausea
- Stiff neck and back
- Confusion
- Extreme weakness
- Bulging soft spots on a baby's head
- Seizure
- Coma

How is Bacterial Meningitis spread?

Bacterial meningitis can be contagious. It can be spread through the exchange (e.g. kissing) of respiratory and throat secretions (e.g. saliva or mucus). Some bacteria can be spread due to close or long contact with a person infected with bacterial meningitis virus in the same household or daycare center. If you have been exposed to someone with bacterial meningitis or see the symptoms, see a doctor right away for diagnosis and treatment.

What are the risk factors for Bacterial Meningitis?

Factors that can increase your risk of bacterial meningitis include

- Age: Infants are at the highest risk but people of any age are at risk
- Community setting: disease spreads quickly among large groups of people that have gathered together (e.g. college fresh men living in residence halls are at an increased risk of meningococcal meningitis).
- Certain medical conditions: diseases, medication, and surgical procedures may weaken the immune system.
- Working with meningitis-causing pathogens
- Travel: traveling to certain areas during dry season

Is there a treatment for Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial Meningitis can be treated effectively with antibiotics. Treatment needs to start as soon as possible.

Are there complications of Bacterial Meningitis later?

Yes, it's very important to see the doctor on a regular basis after leaving the hospital. Some problems may include:

- Hearing, vision, speech problems
- Seizures
- Muscle weakness
- Learning delays – physical or mental

Can Bacterial Meningitis be prevented?

- Adults and children should wash their hands after touching any nose or throat fluid, before eating or when hands are soiled to decrease the chance of spreading the germs.
- A specific antibiotic can be given to household members and people in childcare settings who have been exposed to the H-Flu or meningococcus germs. None is given for pneumococcus.
- Vaccines against H-Flu disease and pneumococcus are given as part of routine baby shots for infants and toddlers and are required for nursery or day care attendance.
- A vaccine against meningococcus is recommended for all adolescents at age 11-12 years and a booster dose at age 16.

Always Practice Healthy Habits:

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, or turn away when coughing.
- Immediately throw away used tissues, followed by careful hand washing.
- Avoid sharing objects if they have been in the mouth (pacifiers, toys, silverware, etc.); wash objects in hot, soapy water between use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing, sneezing or touching common surfaces like door knobs, keyboards and telephones. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaners.

For more information on Bacterial Meningitis, call (816) 325-7204

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