

FACT SHEET

Bacterial Meningitis

What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial Meningitis is an infection in the fluid around the spinal cord and brain that can be caused by many different kinds of bacteria. Anyone at any age can get meningitis.

How is it spread?

It is primarily spread through the respiratory droplets of an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It can also be spread by direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person through kissing, sharing drinking glasses or eating utensils for example. The first signs of illness usually appear 3-7 days after exposure. If you have been directly exposed to someone with bacterial meningitis, consult your doctor immediately.

What are the symptoms?

- Sudden onset fever, headache, or stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Confusion
- Difficulty breathing
- Seizure
- Shock or coma

How can it be prevented?

There are vaccines that can be given to protect against bacteria that cause certain types of Bacterial Meningitis. These include (1) Meningococcal vaccines, (2) Pneumococcal vaccines, (3) Haemophilus influenzae serotype b (Hib) vaccine, and (4) Bacille Calmette-Guerin vaccine.

Handwashing is important, especially after touching any oral or nasal secretions. Avoid sharing food, beverages, eating utensils, toothbrushes, etc. Practice healthy habits such as covering your mouth when sneezing and coughing, throw away used tissues immediately, practice good handwashing, and use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when available.

How is it treated?

Bacterial Meningitis usually requires hospitalization and antibiotic therapy. Treatment should be started as soon as possible. Sometimes, household members and close contacts are also treated with antibiotics to prevent the disease.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.