



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

Meningitis

Meningitis is a disease caused by the inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord known as the meninges. The inflammation is usually caused by an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

Meningitis may develop in response to a number of causes, usually bacteria or viruses, but meningitis can also be caused by physical injury, cancer or certain drugs.

The severity of illness and the treatment for meningitis differ depending on the cause. Thus, it is important to know the specific cause of meningitis.

Transmission

Bacterial Meningitis

Bacterial meningitis is contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., kissing).

Viral Meningitis

Enteroviruses, the most common cause of viral meningitis, are most often spread from person to person through fecal contamination (which can occur when changing a diaper or using the toilet and not properly washing hands afterwards), but enteroviruses can also be spread via eye, nose, and mouth secretions (such as saliva, nasal mucus, or sputum), or blister fluid.

A common outcome of meningococcal infection is **meningitis**. When caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria it is known as meningococcal meningitis. When someone has meningococcal meningitis, the protective membranes covering their brain and spinal cord, known as the meninges, become infected and swell. The symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. There are often additional symptoms, such as

- Nausea
- Vomiting

- Photophobia (increased sensitivity to light)
- Altered mental status (confusion)

The symptoms of meningococcal meningitis can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within 3-7 days after exposure

Prevention

Keeping up to date with recommended immunizations is the best defense against meningococcal disease. Maintaining healthy habits, like getting plenty of rest and not coming into close contact with people who are sick, can also help.

Vaccination

There is a vaccine for the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. However, available vaccines do not cover all serogroups ("strains") of *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. Like with any vaccine, meningococcal vaccines are not 100% effective. This means that even if you have been vaccinated, there is still a chance you can develop a meningococcal infection. People should know the symptoms of meningococcal meningitis and meningococcal septicemia since early recognition and quick medical attention are extremely important

For further information visit www.CDC.org, or contact your local Health care provider