

Bacterial Meningitis

Meningococcal Disease

What is bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is a very serious infection of the fluid in the spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. It is usually caused by one of three bacteria types: *haemophilus influenza* type b, *Neisseria meningitides*, or *Streptococcus pneumonia*.

Is it contagious?

Yes. It is spread through the respiratory secretions from the nose and throat (coughing, sneezing, kissing). It can also be spread through prolonged contact with the oral secretions of an infected person (i.e., spouse, caregiver, etc.).

What are the symptoms of bacterial viral meningitis?

High fever, headache (maybe severe), stiff neck, irritability, sensitivity to light, drowsiness or confusion, nausea and vomiting. However, symptoms may not be the same for all people. In babies symptoms may be difficult to identify: They can include a high fever, vomiting, irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby, and a refusal to eat. Symptoms can arise over a few hours or one-to-two days.

How is it diagnosed?

The only way to positively identify bacterial meningitis is through laboratory testing of the spinal fluid (obtained via a spinal tap). Early diagnosis is very important in successful treatment.

How is it treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated by a number of antibiotics. The earlier treatment begins the more likely it is to be successful. Early treatment reduces the risk of death to below 15-percent, but the risk is higher in the elderly. Permanent damage can include hearing loss, organ damage, and it may affect mental health.

Am I at risk for bacterial meningitis?

Anyone can get bacterial meningitis, but it is most common in infants, children and teenagers.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes. There are two types of vaccines for persons aged 2-55. See your doctor for information on being immunized.

Who should be vaccinated?

Healthy adolescents over the age of 11. It is especially recommended for older teenagers who are entering college and will be living in a dormitory setting.

Is it common?

Bacterial meningitis is not common, affecting about 1-in-100,000 persons annually in the United States.