



Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the blood and meninges (the thin covering of the brain and spinal cord). It is a relatively rare disease caused by infection with the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*.

How is this disease spread?

Meningococcal disease spreads by direct contact with the saliva or with respiratory droplets from the nose and throat of the infected person.

Who is at risk of getting this disease?

Persons generally considered at increased risk of getting the disease from a person who is infected are household members, close friends/daily playmates, and health care workers who had direct saliva contact with the case (such as may occur during resuscitation).

Persons who are not considered at increased risk are those who have had casual contact with the case, such as occurs in a regular classroom, office, or factory setting.

What are the symptoms?

People can carry the bacteria in their nose and throat without becoming ill. Infection causes fever, intense headache, nausea and often vomiting, stiff neck, and frequently a rash. If symptoms occur, the ill person

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should see a doctor immediately. In previous years, up to 50% of the people with clinical disease died. Today, with early diagnosis and treatment, only 5 - 15% of cases die.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear 2 to 10 days after infection, but usually within 3 to 4 days.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

Antibiotics, such as penicillin and ampicillin, are used to treat meningococcal disease.

Should people who have been around a person with meningococcal disease be treated? Household members and close friends/daily playmates of infected persons, as well as health care workers who had direct saliva contact with the infected person, should generally receive an antibiotic called rifampin. The antibiotic does two things: 1) it reduces the risk of disease among these persons, and 2) it eliminates the bacteria from the nose and throat of these persons so that it may not be further spread in the community.

Persons who are not considered at increased risk, such as classmates and co-workers, do not need treatment with the antibiotic.

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What can be done to stop the spread of the bacteria?

Anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms should cover their mouths and noses with disposable paper tissues when sneezing or coughing.

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal disease?

There is a vaccine for some strains of meningococcal disease, however it is not recommended for everyone. It is recommended for persons without a functional spleen and for persons whose immune systems are compromised. College freshmen who live in dormitories are at a higher risk for meningococcal disease and should talk with their physician about possibly receiving the vaccine.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health
Department (405) 425-4437*

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