

What You Should Know About Meningococcal Meningitis

What is meningitis?

- An illness that causes infection of the area around the brain and spinal cord. It can also cause blood infections.
- Many different germs may cause it. It is a serious illness that can cause people to be blind, deaf, have brain damage, lose arms or legs or even die. But, there are medicines that help many people get over the illness.

What is meningococcal meningitis?

- A very bad type of meningitis caused by the germ (bacteria) *Neisseria meningitides*. Even with the right medicines, 10-20% of people with this illness die, often within a few hours of when they first get sick.

Can I get it from other people?

- Yes, but it is not as easy to get as a cold or the flu.

How would I get it from someone?

- You could only get it if you were in direct contact. For example, if the person who had it coughed or sneezed right in your face, or you kissed someone on the mouth who had it, or you used an unwashed fork or spoon right after a sick person used it.



- The germs **do not** float around in the air.



How would I know if I had it?

You might have some of these signs:



- Fever
- Very bad headache
- Stiff neck
- Nausea and maybe vomiting
- Very sleepy or confused
- A skin rash that looks like small purplish red spots



A doctor should see any baby with a fever of 101 degrees or more who will not wake up easily.

Who is most likely to get sick with this illness?

- Many normal healthy people have the germs in their nose and throat and never get sick.
- Two groups of people have a higher chance of getting sick if they are around someone who has the illness:
 1. People who live together where there is a case of the illness,
 2. Preschool children in day care centers where there is a case of the illness.
- Most of the time, children in the same school where there is a case do not have a higher chance of getting the illness. They should just be watched for the signs of the illness.
- This is also true for adults who work together.
- Even people who work in the hospital only have a higher chance of getting sick if they have direct face-to-face contact with a sick person.
- Children who attend the same school or adults who work at the same place **do not** have a higher chance of getting the illness.

What can I do to help keep my family and myself from getting sick?

Using good personal hygiene will help keep you and your family from getting sick. Good hygiene includes:



- Covering your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Washing your hands a lot.
- Not eating or drinking after someone else.
- Not letting people kiss your baby on the mouth.
- Avoiding overcrowded places.



What should I do if I or someone in my family gets sick?



- Do not wait. If someone has the signs of the illness, call or go to your doctor right away.

What if I am in direct contact with someone who has the illness?

- If your doctor thinks you are a “high risk” contact (household contact, best friend, day-care teacher) you may be asked to take some medicine that will help keep you from getting sick. The medicine is taken for 1 or 2 days.
- Most of the time, the chances that you or your family who are exposed to a person with the illness will also get sick are very low.
- If you are around someone who has this illness you should be aware of the signs of the illness.
- Most people will get sick in 2-10 days, but most often in 3-4 days after they have been around someone with the illness.

Is there a shot (vaccine) that can keep people from getting meningococcal meningitis?



- **Yes, but most of the time it is only given to people who live somewhere where there are a lot of people who have the illness.**
- It is also given to people who have certain medical problems, but their doctor should tell them to get it.
- The shot protects people from four kinds of the bacteria.
- This shot takes about 2 weeks to protect you.
- The protection is gone in about 3 years.
- It does not protect children under 2 years old.

Should I keep my children out of school? Should ball games or concerts be cancelled?



- No. The chance of getting sick at these places is small since people have to be in very close contact to get the germs.

If I want to know more about this illness, what should I do?

- **You can call the numbers below.**
Galveston County Health District
Epidemiology (409) 938-2345
Community Health Nursing
(409) 938-2456
(409) 938-2244
- **You can talk to your doctor.**
- **You can access information on the internet at:**
Texas Department of State Health Services
www.tdh.state.tx.us
Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov>

