



MENINGITIS FACTS

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria (germs) called meningococci, also known as *Neisseria meningitidis*. Although meningococcal disease is uncommon, it is a very serious disease. The infection can develop very quickly and can be fatal in about 10 per cent of cases. If infection is diagnosed early enough and the right antibiotics are given quickly, most people make a complete recovery. There are five main types of meningococcal bacteria. In the U.S., a vaccine is available that helps prevent four of the five types.

Meningococcal bacteria are difficult to spread

The meningococcal bacteria are difficult to spread. They are only passed from person to person by regular, close, prolonged household and intimate contact with secretions from the back of the nose and throat. Close contact includes activities such as kissing, sharing water bottles, sharing eating/drinking utensils or sharing cigarettes with someone who is infected; or being within 3-6 feet of an infected person who is coughing or sneezing. They cannot be picked up from water supplies, swimming pools, buildings or factories.

Signs and symptoms

- Fever
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Neck stiffness
- Discomfort when looking at bright lights (photophobia)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Aching or sore muscles
- Difficulty walking
- General malaise
- Moaning, unintelligible speech
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- Collapse
- Rash of red-purple pinprick spots or larger bruises.
- Painful or swollen joints

Signs and symptoms in infants and young children are similar to above, but may also include:

- Refusing to eat
- Irritability, fretfulness
- Grunting or moaning
- Extreme tiredness or floppiness
- Turning away from light (photophobia)
- Convulsions or twitching
- Dislike of being handled

Get further medical help if you are still worried

- You know your family and friends better than anybody else. If somebody close to you has some of these signs and symptoms, and you are worried that they are much sicker than usual, seek medical help immediately.
- In the very early stages, meningococcal disease can appear to be like other, less serious illnesses. Your doctor may not immediately recognize this illness. Do not hesitate to seek medical help again – even if it has only been an hour or two since you last sought help.
- If the person seems to be sicker, has suddenly developed a rash or becomes drowsy – seek medical help urgently.

Early antibiotic treatment is vital

- If meningococcal disease is suspected, an antibiotic is given immediately. People with meningococcal disease are always admitted to hospital and may require admission to an Intensive Care Unit.
- The sooner that antibiotic and other treatments begin, the less damage the disease will cause. However, this is a very serious infection, which can progress very rapidly despite the best treatment

Where to get help. In an emergency, always call 911 for an ambulance, your doctor, or emergency department of our local hospital.

Questions? Call the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment at 498-67