

Bacterial Meningitis

What is bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is an illness caused by bacteria that affect the thin lining (called meninges) and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. The three most common types of bacterial meningitis are Haemophilus influenzae type B, pneumococcal and meningococcal.

How do I get bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is spread by breathing in respiratory droplets of an infected person's cough or sneeze and through kissing. People usually become infected when they are in close contact with an infected person for an extended period of time. Many people can carry the bacteria and spread it to others without ever having symptoms.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear within 2-4 days, but can appear up to 10 days after exposure to an infected person. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rash (with meningococcal meningitis only)
- Symptoms can develop into confusion, coma and seizures

How long is an infected person contagious (able to spread the disease)?

- WITHOUT treatment – until bacteria are no longer present in the person's nose and throat.
- WITH treatment – until they have had 24 hours of proper antibiotic treatment.

Prevention

- Haemophilus influenzae type B meningitis can be prevented through routine childhood immunizations. Follow the Childhood Immunization Schedule. (Ask your health care provider or local health department for a copy.)
- Always cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- Wash hands often.

Treatment of bacterial meningitis

If you think you may have been exposed to bacterial meningitis – see a health care provider immediately. Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics. Current information on effective antibiotics is available to you and your doctor through your local or state health department.

