

Vaccinations (Continued)

A vaccine is also available that offers protection against some strains of bacteria which cause bacterial meningococcal meningitis. The meningococcal vaccine has been recommended for adolescents. The vaccine is also recommended for people traveling to countries where outbreaks of meningitis are common.

Wash your hands!

Viral meningitis is prevented only through good hygiene practices.

Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently is your best defense against meningitis and other infectious diseases.



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Meningitis



Information
Brochure

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection and inflammation of the brain lining (the meninges) and the fluid that circulates around the brain and spinal cord (cerebrospinal fluid). Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. The severity of the infection and type of treatment varies depending upon which type of meningitis a person has.

How is meningitis spread?

Meningitis is spread through direct contact with mouth, nose, or throat secretions or droplets. The infection can spread through such activities as coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing eating utensils or a toothbrush.

The period of time between exposure to the virus and when symptoms appear varies. The typical incubation period for bacterial meningitis is 2-10 days.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningitis?

Symptoms of both viral and bacterial meningitis may include:

- fever
- stiff neck
- severe headache
- nausea
- vomiting
- seizure
- sensitivity to light
- confusion/drowsiness
- skin rash near the armpit or on hands and feet
- rapid progression of small pinpoint dot hemorrhages called petechiae under the skin

These symptoms may develop rapidly (over several hours). It is easy to mistake the early symptoms of bacterial or viral meningitis for the flu.

In newborns and small infants, the classic symptoms of fever, headache, and stiff neck may be absent or difficult to detect. Instead, the infant may have increased crying, be unusually sleepy, or eat poorly. It is important to seek medical advice if any of these symptoms are noted.

How is meningitis diagnosed and treated?

To accurately diagnose the illness, your doctor may need to perform a lumbar puncture. In this procedure, a sample of cerebrospinal fluid is obtained by inserting a needle into an area of the lower back. The fluid is tested in a lab to determine the type of meningitis. The results will determine the appropriate treatment for the infected person and close contacts.

Bacterial meningitis is treated aggressively with intravenous antibiotics in the hospital, and it is considered contagious until 24 hours after such treatment. Viral meningitis usually resolves itself with proper rest and fluids in 1-2 weeks.

How can I prevent meningitis?

If you have been in close contact with someone who is diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, your doctor may prescribe you antibiotics to help prevent you from obtaining or spreading the infection.

Vaccinations

Many babies and young children now receive protection against some of the bacteria that cause bacterial meningitis as part of their routine childhood immunizations. The PPV protects the elderly against pneumonia and meningitis and is recommended for all adults over 65.