
Bacterial Meningitis

What You Need to Know



What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is an infection of the fluid around the spinal cord or brain caused by a bacteria. Many kinds of bacteria may cause meningitis, but the most common are:

- Streptococcus pneumoniae (Pneumococcus)
- Neisseria meningitis (Meningococcus)
- Haemophilus Influenzae (H-Flu or HIB)

Who can get Bacterial Meningitis?

Anyone, at any age. However,

- Pneumococcus is more common in infants;
- Meningococcus is more common in children, teenagers and young adults;
- H-Flu can occur in infants and children, but is rare because of the HIB vaccine for children.
- Elderly adults or those weakened by illness or medicine.

How do you get Bacterial Meningitis?

By direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Kissing, sharing utensils or drinking glasses can spread the infection.

How long after exposure to the bacteria until the first signs of illness appear?

Can range from 1-10 days.

What are the symptoms of Bacterial Meningitis?

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Vomiting/nausea
- Stiff neck and back
- Confusion
- Extreme weakness
- Bulging soft spots on a baby's head
- Seizure
- Coma

What should I do if I see symptoms?

See a doctor right away for diagnosis and treatment.

What is the treatment for Bacterial Meningitis?

Antibiotics are given. Treatment will help you get well and keep the disease from spreading.

Can Bacterial Meningitis cause problems later?

Yes. It's very important to see the doctor on a regular basis after leaving the hospital. Some problems may include:

- Hearing, vision, speech problems
- Muscle weakness
- Seizures
- Learning delays – physical or mental

Can Bacterial Meningitis be prevented?

- Adults and children should wash their hands after touching any nose or throat fluid, before eating or when hands are soiled to decrease the chance of spreading the germs.
- A specific antibiotic can be given to household members and people in childcare settings who have been exposed to the H-Flu or meningococcus germs. None is given for pneumococcus.
- Vaccines against H-Flu disease and pneumococcus are given as part of routine baby shots for infants and toddlers and are required for nursery or day care attendance.
- A vaccine against meningococcus is recommended for all adolescents at age 11-12 years and a booster dose at age 16.
- Avoid sharing food, beverages, eating utensils, toothbrushes, or cigarettes with others.

Always Practice Healthy Habits:

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, or turn away when coughing.
- Immediately throw away used tissues, followed by careful hand washing.
- Avoid sharing objects if they have been in the mouth (pacifiers, toys, silverware, etc.); wash objects in hot, soapy water between use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after coughing, sneezing or touching common surfaces like door knobs, keyboards and telephones. You can also use alcohol-based hand cleaners.



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