

What is meningococcal disease?

Neisseria meningitides is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis and blood infections in the United States. These bacteria most commonly infect a person's blood or the fluid or lining of the brain/spinal cord (meninges).

How is meningococcal disease spread?

Invasive meningococcal disease is spread by close contact, such as living in the same house, sharing utensils, kissing, or other such activities. People with the disease are still thought to be able to pass it to others until 24 hours after beginning antibiotics. Outbreaks are most likely to happen in childcare settings, military recruit camps, schools, and colleges.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningococcal infections?

Symptoms of an invasive infection with *N. meningitides* may include:

- Fever
- Petechial rash (rash made of pinpoint spots close together)
- Purpura (rash of purple spots on the skin caused by internal bleeding from small blood vessels)
- Sepsis (harmful bacteria and their toxins found in body tissues).

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually take 3-4 days to appear, with a range of 2-10 days.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. Those at increased risk for contracting this disease include:

- Infants less than one year of age
- Adolescents and young adults 16-23 years of age
- College freshman living in dormitories
- Laboratory personnel who are routinely exposed to these bacteria
- United States military recruits
- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where the disease is common, such as parts of Africa
- Anyone with a removed or damaged spleen
- Those with ongoing autoimmune deficiencies
- People who might have been exposed to meningitis during an outbreak.

What type of health problems are caused by meningococcal infections?

Meningococcal disease can cause death in up to 20% of cases, but that varies depending on the type of disease and the availability of appropriate healthcare. Approximately 10%-20% of survivors will suffer from long-term problems, such as hearing loss, mental deficiencies, and loss of limbs.

How is meningococcal disease diagnosed?

Meningococcal disease can be diagnosed by spinal taps to test the fluid in the spinal cord, and

blood tests. However, if the disease is suspected, antibiotics should be given as soon as possible, even if it is before these tests take place.

How is meningococcal disease treated?

Immediate treatment of meningococcal disease is critical. Those with suspected meningococcal disease should be treated promptly without waiting for laboratory confirmation. Once this disease is suspected, antibiotics should be given within 30 minutes.

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

Vaccines are available that help protect against all three serogroups (B, C, and Y) of meningococcal disease that are commonly seen in the United States. Meningococcal vaccine is recommended for adolescents 11-12 years of age with a booster dose at age 16, and for adults and children with certain risk factors.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 801-538-6191
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

