



Important Information about Bacterial Meningitis

What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by viruses, parasites, fungi, and bacteria. Viral meningitis is the most common and the least serious. Bacterial meningitis is the most serious form of bacterial infection with the potential for serious, long-term complications. It is an uncommon disease, but requires urgent treatment with antibiotics to prevent permanent damage or death.

What are the Symptoms?

Someone with meningitis will become very ill. The illness may develop over one or two days, but it can also rapidly progress in a matter of hours. Not everyone with meningitis will have the same symptoms.

Children (over 1 year old) and adults with meningitis may have:

- Severe headache
- High temperature
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to bright lights
- Neck stiffness, joint pains
- Drowsiness or confusion

In both children and adults, there may be a rash of tiny, red-purple spots or bruises caused by bleeding under the skin. These can occur anywhere on the body. They are a sign of blood poisoning (septicemia), which sometimes happens with meningitis, particularly the meningococcal strain.

How is Bacterial Meningitis Spread?

Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as diseases like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. The germs live naturally in the back of our noses and throats, but they do not live for long outside the body. They are spread when people exchange saliva (such as by kissing, sharing drinking containers, utensils, or cigarettes).

How can Bacterial Meningitis be Prevented?

- Do not share food, drinks, utensils, toothbrushes, or cigarettes.
- While there are vaccines for some other strains of bacterial meningitis, they are used only in special circumstances. These include when there is a disease outbreak in a community or for people traveling to a country where there is a high risk of getting the disease.
- Vaccinations are also recommended for college students, particularly freshmen living in dorms or residence halls.

What should you do if you think you or a friend might have Bacterial Meningitis?

- Seek prompt medical attention.

For More Information

Your school nurse, family doctor, and the staff at your local or regional health department office are excellent sources for information on all communicable diseases. You may also call your local health department or Regional Texas Department of Health office to ask about the meningococcal vaccine.

Additional information may also be found on the websites for:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- Texas Department of State Health Services: www.dshs.texas.gov