

# **Meningococcal Disease (meningococcal meningitis, meningococemia)**

## **What is meningococcal meningitis?**

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord). It is a relatively rare disease and usually occurs as a single isolated event. Clusters of cases or outbreaks are rare in the United States.

## **Who gets meningococcal disease?**

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children.

## **How is the germ meningococcus spread?**

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Many people carry this particular germ in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Although most people exposed to the meningococcus germ do not become seriously ill, some may develop fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash. Up to 25 percent of patients who recover may have chronic damage to the nervous system. The disease is occasionally fatal.

## **How soon do the symptoms appear?**

The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

## **When and for how long is an infected person able to spread the disease?**

From the time a person is first infected until the germ is no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat, he or she may transmit the disease. The duration varies according to treatment used.

## **What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?**

Antibiotics, such as penicillin G or ceftriaxone, can be used to treat people with meningococcal disease.

## **Should people who have been in contact with a diagnosed case of meningococcal meningitis be treated?**

Only people who have been in close contact (household members, intimate contacts, health care personnel performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, daycare center playmates, etc.) need to be considered for preventive treatment. Such people are usually advised to obtain a prescription for a special antibiotic (either rifampin, ciprofloxacin or ceftriaxone) from their physician. Casual contact as might occur in a regular classroom, office or factory setting is not usually significant enough to cause concern.

## **Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?**

Currently, there is a vaccine that will protect against some of the strains of meningococcus. It is recommended in outbreak situations, and for those traveling to areas of the world where high rates of the disease are known to occur. For some college students, such as freshman living in dormitories, there is a modestly increased risk of meningococcal disease; students and parents should be educated about meningococcal disease and the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.

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**Taken from New York State Department of Health Communicable Disease Fact Sheets.**