

# FactSheet

Para Su Información

## Bacterial Meningitis

### What is bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is swelling of the meninges (membranes that cover the brain and the spinal cord), caused by infection with bacteria.

Bacterial meningitis should be treated as a medical emergency requiring immediate hospital treatment. It is a very serious illness that can result in disability and even death. Other types of meningitis can be caused by viruses or fungi.

### What are the causes of bacterial meningitis?

Many different types of bacteria can cause meningitis. The two leading causes of bacterial meningitis are *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Neisseria meningitidis*.

### What are the symptoms of meningitis?

Signs and symptoms for **any type** of meningitis may include:

- Severe headache
- High fever and chills
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sleepiness
- Confusion
- Seizures

Symptoms in infants and young children may be hard to detect and may only include:

- Inactivity or decreased activity
- Irritability
- Poor feeding
- Seizures

For both adults and children, symptoms may develop in a matter of hours or over the course of several days.

### What is the treatment for bacterial meningitis?

There are several antibiotics used in treatment. The type of bacteria causing the infection will determine what antibiotics are used. Early treatment is very important in preventing other health problems caused by bacterial meningitis.

### What other health problems can be caused by bacterial meningitis?

Health problems may include:

- Hearing loss / deafness
- Visual impairment / loss of vision
- Brain damage

The heart, kidneys and adrenal glands may also be affected. Even though serious health problems can occur, most people recover fully after having bacterial meningitis.

### Is bacterial meningitis contagious?

Some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious and can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when kissing someone with the illness because the bacteria are present in the patient's saliva.

Thus, sharing eating utensils, toothbrushes or cigarettes may also spread the illness. These bacteria usually cause infections other than meningitis, such as earache, sore throat or sinus infection. Scientists do not know why some people get the infection as meningitis.

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Bacterial meningitis is not usually spread through casual contact. People living with someone who has bacterial meningitis are at a higher risk for getting infected.

### **How can bacterial meningitis be prevented?**

Vaccines to prevent some forms of bacterial meningitis are available:

The *Haemophilus influenzae* type b vaccine (Hib) and pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV7) are part of the routine immunizations suggested for children.

The pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) is suggested for adults older than 65 and young adults or children with weakened immune systems or chronic illnesses.

The meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) is now being suggested for people in the following groups who have not been vaccinated:

- Children 11-12 years old
- Teenagers entering high school (about age 15)
- College freshmen living in dormitories

Preventive antibacterial treatment may be prescribed if someone has been exposed to a person who has either *Haemophilus influenzae* type b or meningococcal bacterial meningitis. Treatment is suggested for the following:

- Household contacts and children in child care
- People with direct contact to the patient's saliva by sharing eating utensils or toothbrush, kissing, etc.

- Travel companions or those sitting next to the patient on a flight longer than 8 hours
- Health care workers with direct contact with the patient's saliva

Co-workers, classmates and anyone else that did not have contact with the saliva of a person with bacterial meningitis do not require preventive treatment.

### **What should I do if I or someone I know has symptoms of meningitis?**

People showing symptoms of meningitis should contact their doctor or go to an emergency room as soon as possible.

### **What happens when SNHD receives a report of bacterial meningitis?**

The health district conducts an investigation to try find out where and how the person became sick. Staff also tries to prevent further spread of the illness in the community.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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