

FactSheet

Para Su Información

Meningococcal Disease (Spinal Meningitis, Meningococcemia, Neisseria Meningitidis)

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bacterium, *Neisseria meningitidis*. This is one of many organisms that infects the blood and the meninges (the tissues covering the brain and spinal cord). Blood infections caused by this bacterium without meningitis are called meningococcemia. Cases occur more often during the winter and spring. Meningococcal disease is relatively rare.

Who gets meningococcal disease?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. However, it is more common in infants, children and young adults. Meningococcal disease occurs more often in places where there are crowded living conditions.

How does the disease spread?

Meningococcal disease spreads by contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person. Many people carry the bacteria in their nose and throat without signs of illness; however, they may spread the disease to others.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of meningitis appear suddenly, and include fever, intense headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting. Frequently a rash appears. Changes in behavior such as confusion, and sleepiness, may occur. In infants, the only signs of meningitis may be irritability, tiredness and poor feeding. Babies with meningitis usually run a fever, but this is not a reliable sign. Meningococcemia, the blood infection, usually involves a fever and a rash. Persons with symptoms of meningococcal disease should see a

doctor immediately. Meningococcal disease can be deadly if not treated quickly.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear 2 to 10 days after infection, but usually within 3 to 4 days.

How long is an infected person able to spread the disease?

A person can spread the disease as long as the bacteria are present in the nose or throat. After treatment, the bacteria usually disappear within 24 hours.

Can a person get this disease again?

Probably not, though there are several types of *N. meningitidis* and infection with one type doesn't provide immunity to other types.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

Antibiotics are used to treat meningococcal disease.

Should people who have been around a person infected with meningococcal disease be treated?

Household members, daycare center playmates, and close friends of infected persons, or anyone who has saliva contact through kissing, sharing eating utensils, or drinking from the same glass, need to ask their doctor about preventive treatment with antibiotics. People who have had casual contact such as occurs in a classroom, office, or factory setting usually do not need preventive treatment.

(continued)

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal disease?

Presently, there is a vaccine that protects against two types of meningococcus. The vaccine is available through the Immunizations Unit at the Southern Nevada Health District (702) 759-0850.

What can be done to stop the spread of meningococcal disease?

People with colds or influenza-like symptoms should be careful to cover their mouths and noses with tissue when sneezing or coughing. During outbreaks in schools, daycare centers, or in places such as barracks where there are crowded living

conditions, pregnant women or people with chronic red blood cell disorders should ask their doctor for advice regarding preventive treatment.

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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