

Bacterial Meningitis

Fact Sheet



What is bacterial meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the protective membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. It may be caused by a virus or bacteria. This fact sheet is specific to bacterial causes.

Symptoms

Symptoms can worsen over several hours.
Seek care immediately.

- **High fever**
- **Headache**
- **Stiff neck**
- **Nausea & vomiting**
- **Sensitivity to light**
- **Confusion & sleepiness**
- **Newborns & infants may not present with typical symptoms. Signs may include inactivity, a bulging soft spot on head, irritability, vomiting, and poor feeding.**

Testing may include a combination of examination, blood tests, lumbar puncture (spinal tap), and imaging

Prevention

Wash hands regularly, cover coughs and sneezes, and avoid sharing drinks or utensils. Vaccines help prevent some forms of bacterial meningitis. Available vaccines include Meningococcal, Pneumococcal, and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib). **Talk to your doctor about vaccination.**

How is it spread?

Some bacteria that cause meningitis, especially meningococcal bacteria, can be spread by direct close contact with an infected person. This occurs through coughing, sneezing, sharing utensils or drinks, and kissing. Individuals living in crowded settings such as dormitories are at higher risk for that form. Individuals with weakened immune systems are also at higher risk. Some of these bacteria live harmlessly in the nose or throat, but can lead to infection in others.

Treatment

Early diagnosis and hospital care greatly improves outcomes. In some cases, such as meningococcal disease, public health may also recommend antibiotics for close contacts.

