

Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet

***Neisseria meningitidis* (the meningococcus) is a bacterium (germ) that can cause serious infections**

The meningococcus causes meningitis, an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. It also causes serious infections of the blood (meningococemia) and of other normally sterile body sites (e.g., joints). These infections may lead to death.

The meningococcus is spread by droplets or by direct contact

The meningococci are sprayed into the air through sneezing and coughing. Many people may carry the bacteria in their noses and throats, and they will not become ill - they are healthy carriers. These carriers can spread the germ to other people.

Symptoms to look for:

- High fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Severe headache
- Stiffness and pains in the neck, shoulders, and back
- Skin rash of small bright red spots

Symptoms occur within 2-10 days (usually 3-4) days after the person has been exposed. Symptoms often begin suddenly.

See a doctor immediately for treatment

People who think they may have an infection due to the meningococcus should see a doctor immediately. Treatment with an antibiotic should be started right away to stop the infection from causing brain damage or death. Lab tests are needed to prove what kind of infection a person has.

People in close contact with a case may need an antibiotic

Preventive treatment with certain antibiotics is recommended and should not be delayed. Your doctor or health department will decide which medicine is best in your situation.

People in close contact may include:

- Somebody who lives in the same house
- A person who has contact with the patient's mouth or nose secretions, such as through kissing or by sharing cigarettes, or using the same eating and drinking utensils, glasses, and plates
- A person who has done medical treatments like giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on the patient, or intubating or suctioning the patient
- Children sharing toys, such as in group day care centers, family child care homes, or in nurseries

Check with your doctor or your local health department for advice