

Meningitis is swelling of the cover of the brain or spinal cord. Meningitis that is spread from person to person is caused by many viruses or bacteria (germs).

SYMPTOMS (SIGNS)

Symptoms of bacterial and viral meningitis may be the same.

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Upset stomach and throwing up
- Very bad headache
- Being bothered by light
- Stiff neck
- Being very sleepy
- Confusion (mistaking one thing for something else)

Babies and young children may:

- Not eat
- Be fretful
- Be hard to wake up
- Have fever, or
- Have a sharp, moaning cry.

A person with symptoms of meningitis should go to a doctor right away!

Bacterial Meningitis

Meningitis caused by bacteria is rare and serious. **This kind of meningitis is an emergency.**

How It Spreads

Many kinds of bacteria can cause meningitis. These bacteria spread from person to person through mucus and saliva. People can get bacterial meningitis by kissing and sharing things like cigarettes, lipstick and drinks.

Testing

Testing for bacterial meningitis is done by sending some fluid from the spine to the lab.

Treatment

People sick with bacterial meningitis are put in the hospital and given antibiotics. Sometimes, people closest to those who have bacterial meningitis are given antibiotics to keep them from getting sick. This depends on the kind of bacteria that causes the meningitis. About 15 out of every 100 people with bacterial meningitis die from it. (Death is more common in babies and older adults.)

Viral Meningitis

Viral meningitis is more common. It can be caused by many types of viruses.

How It Spreads

The viruses that most often cause viral meningitis are spread from person to person through mucus and saliva. They can also be spread in the stool (poop) of a sick person.

Testing

Testing for viral meningitis is done by sending some fluid from the spine to the lab.

Treatment

Viral meningitis is serious but most people get better on their own within 10 days. Doctors often treat with bed rest, fluids, and medicines to reduce fever and headache. Sometimes people are put in the hospital to treat their symptoms.

How to prevent meningitis - read the other side of this page.

Meningitis

Immunization

There is more than one vaccine that protects against the bacteria that most often cause meningitis.

Meningococcal Vaccine

The meningococcal vaccine helps protect youths and adults against two out of the three most common kinds of meningococcal disease. People who should get the vaccine are: 11 and 12 year olds (older teens may need a booster dose), students starting college, people in the US military, travelers to other countries and people with illnesses caused by weak immune systems.

Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine

People who should get this vaccine are: people 65 and older, those over age 2 with long term health problems, as well as adults over age 19 who smoke or have asthma and people living in places giving long-term care.

Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine

This vaccine protects children under age 2 against the seven kinds of bacteria that cause most of the serious meningitis illness in children. It is given with other shots at 2, 4, 6, and 12-15 months of age. Some older children and adults may need a dose of this vaccine. Ask your child's doctor.

Hib Vaccine

This vaccine protects against one type of meningitis, swelling of the throat and a type of pneumonia. Children need 3 to 4 shots, depending on the vaccine, to be fully protected. It is given with other shots at 2, 4, 6, and 12-15 months of age.

Healthy Habits

As with many other illnesses, you are less likely to get sick if you have good health habits like eating well, getting plenty of rest, exercising and staying away from people who are sick.

Other things you can do to stay healthy are:

- Wash your hands often.
- Don't share things that touch other people's mouths like lip balm, lipstick, cigarettes, forks, spoons, and drinks.

If you or someone you know has been in close contact with someone who might have meningitis, call the doctor right away.