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*Disease Investigation Branch*  
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## **Meningococcal Meningitis**

(Bacterial meningitis)

### **What is meningococcal meningitis?**

Meningococcal meningitis is a life-threatening infection of the protective covering of the brain and spinal cord. It is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria.

### **How do you get it?**

Meningococcal meningitis is transmitted by direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected individuals. It is not spread by casual contact or by breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. Approximately 10 to 25% of the population carries *N. meningitidis* in their nose and throat without developing symptoms of the disease. People can transmit this disease without ever having shown symptoms.

### **What are the symptoms of meningococcal meningitis?**

Symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, vomiting, neck stiffness, lethargy, irritability, and rash. Up to 20% of those infected will die, and many others may have permanent hearing loss, mental retardation, loss of limbs, or other debilitating effects.

### **When do symptoms start?**

The symptoms usually start 3 to 4 days after exposure to the bacteria but can range from 2 to 10 days.

### **For how long is a person contagious?**

Cases of this disease are considered contagious until 24 hours after effective antibiotic treatment has been implemented.

### **What is the treatment for this disease?**

Doctor prescribed antibiotic treatment is required. People with symptoms of meningitis should see a doctor as soon as possible. In addition, those who have been in close contact with an infected person (including household members, playmates at day

care centers, etc.), may need preventive treatment. Generally, people who have had only limited, indirect contact (such as students in a classroom or co-workers), do not need preventive therapy.

### **Is there a vaccine for this disease?**

Yes. There were previously just two meningococcal vaccines available in the United States and a new one was licensed in February, 2010. These vaccines protect against four of the five different types of meningococcal disease. Two of the vaccines are for those aged 11 to 55 years, and the other for those aged 2 to 10 years or 56 years and older. It is recommended that college students living in dormitories, laboratory workers, military recruits, those living or traveling to areas where meningococcal disease is endemic, and those with weakened immune systems make sure they are protected with vaccination, as they are at a higher risk of developing the disease.

### **Should a student with meningococcal meningitis stay home from work or school?**

Yes. Infected individuals should not attend work or school until they have recovered and have been treated with antibiotics.

### **How can you keep from spreading it?**

All suspected persons with the disease should see a doctor as soon as possible for diagnosis and treatment.

If a case is reported, closely monitor all close contacts for early signs of illness (especially fever). Any suspected cases of meningococcal meningitis should seek immediate treatment and should promptly be reported to the Department of Health.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>