



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Meningococcal Disease

What is meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is an infection caused by bacteria called *meningococcus* also known as *Neisseria meningitidis*. Although meningococcal disease is rare, it is a very serious disease.
- Meningococcal disease is one of the leading causes of meningitis, which is an infection of the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord. Meningococcal disease also causes infection in the bloodstream. Even with effective antibiotic treatment, about 10 percent of infected people die from this disease and there are other serious adverse outcomes.
- There are five main types of meningococcal bacteria. A vaccine is available that helps prevent four of the five types.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease may include:

- Fever
- Discomfort when looking at bright lights (photophobia)
- Extreme drowsiness
- Headache
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Neck stiffness
- Rash with deep red-purple spots or larger blotches

**Meningococcal disease requires immediate medical treatment.
Seek medical attention if you have worrisome symptoms.**

How is meningococcal disease spread?

- Meningococcal disease is spread from person to person by close contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person. **People at greatest risk of exposure include:**
 - Persons who live in the same household, or anyone who has stayed overnight with the infected person during the seven days before their illness started;
 - Anyone who had contact with the patient's saliva (such as through kissing, sharing eating utensils or food, drink containers, toothbrushes, cigarettes) during the seven days before their illness started;
 - Children in a childcare setting who had contact with infected person during the seven days before their illness appeared.

How is meningococcal disease treated?

- Prompt antibiotic treatment is vital. People with meningococcal disease are hospitalized and may require admission to an intensive care unit. This is a very serious infection, which can progress very rapidly despite appropriate and expeditious treatment.
- People who had close contact with an infected person within seven days before their illness started should be offered preventive antibiotic medication. The Health Department is responsible for conducting an investigation to identify contacts and arrange for medication treatment.

How do you prevent meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal vaccine is the best method of protection.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends meningococcal vaccine for all adolescents ages 11-18 years. Vaccine is normally given during routine preadolescent immunization visits (at 11-12 years). Adolescents who did not get the vaccine should get it at the earliest opportunity.
- Vaccine is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease including: college freshmen living in dormitories; military recruits; people with certain immune system problems; people traveling to parts of the world where meningococcal disease is common.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should receive meningococcal vaccine.