

Questions and Answers about Meningitis “Bacterial”

Q What is Meningitis?

A Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by either **viruses** or **bacteria**. It is important to know which type of meningitis a person has because the seriousness and treatment of these infections are different.

Q What is bacterial Meningitis?

A Anyone can get bacterial meningitis. Many people can carry the bacteria in their nose and throat and **not** be sick, however they can spread it to others. The bacteria is usually spread by sneezing and coughing or direct contact. The bacteria then enters the body through the nose and mouth and starts to damage the body.

Bacterial meningitis is usually more common among people who live in crowded places, among infants, children and young adults. Bacterial meningitis is more severe than viral meningitis. Bacterial meningitis can cause brain damage, hearing loss, make it difficult to learn later and sometimes cause death.

Q What are the signs and symptoms of bacterial Meningitis?

A The signs and symptoms for meningitis vary from person to person. The signs and symptoms of viral and bacterial meningitis are often the same. However, **NOT** everyone has all the symptoms. The symptoms and signs are:

- Fever
- Bad headaches
- Stiff neck
- Throwing up or feeling like you will
- Confusion and feeling sleepy
- In infants the signs include crankiness, sleepiness and poor eating
- A skin rash that look like small purple-red spots
- Loss of consciousness

Continued on back

Q Is there treatment for bacterial Meningitis?

A If NOT treated quickly bacterial meningitis may cause death. Quick treatment for bacterial meningitis is very important. Bacterial meningitis is currently treated with medicines called “antibiotics.”

Q How do I prevent bacterial Meningitis?

A Only some types of bacterial meningitis can be spread from person to person, and they are not as easy to catch as a cold or the flu. For these types of bacterial meningitis, it is often recommended that people who live in the same home with an infected person, or who have had direct contact with an infected person’s saliva (spit) or nose mucus (snot), be treated with “antibiotics”. *If so, it is very important that this medicine be given as soon as possible (within days) after contact with the infected person.* To help prevent some causes of bacterial meningitis, there are vaccines available. If you have had contact with an infected person, or may have contact in the future, your health care provider may recommend that you get vaccinated to help prevent the disease.

To help prevent bacterial Meningitis:

- Avoid sharing eating utensils, cigarettes, lipstick, food, sports water bottles and any other items that may be contaminated by spit.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- If recommended by your health care provider, get a shot for bacterial meningitis.
- See your health care provider if you experience the meningitis signs and symptoms.

1/01

Your local Public Health Center is:

