

# Fact Sheet: Bacterial Meningitis

## What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Meningitis is a severe illness that causes inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. People sometimes refer to it as spinal meningitis. Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Bacterial meningitis is usually more severe than viral meningitis. There are several types of bacteria that can cause bacterial meningitis, including *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, group B *Streptococcus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Neisseria meningitidis*. Bacterial meningitis can have serious after-effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, limb amputation, or learning disabilities. Vaccines are available to help prevent you or your children from getting meningitis.

## Signs and Symptoms

Meningitis infection is characterized by:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck.

It is often accompanied by other symptoms such as:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Photophobia (sensitivity to light)
- Altered mental status (confusion)

Symptoms may appear 3 to 7 days after exposure, and are sudden in onset. However, some people can be infected with the bacteria and have no symptoms at all.

## How is it spread?

Bacterial meningitis is contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (saliva or spit) during close or lengthy contact (coughing or kissing). The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. People in the same household or daycare center or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of getting the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with bacterial meningitis should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease.

## Treatment

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective medicines. Early treatment is extremely important. Those who have had contact with someone with bacterial meningitis should contact their health care provider to receive antibiotics as soon as possible.

## Prevention

- Maintain the recommended vaccine schedule for the most effective prevention against bacterial meningitis
- Avoid coming into contact with those who are sick.
- Always wash your hands after touching any nasal or oral secretions and keep hands away from your nose and mouth.
- If you (or your child) develop signs or symptoms of meningitis or if you think you have been exposed, contact your health care provider.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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