

Fact Sheet: Bacterial Meningitis

What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Bacteria or viruses can cause meningitis. Bacterial meningitis is generally more severe and may require hospitalization. There are many different bacteria that can cause meningitis but the two most common are: *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcal meningitis) and *Neisseria meningitidis* (meningococcal meningitis). *Haemophilus influenzae type B* (Hib) related meningitis cases have come down over the past 20 years with introduction of the Hib vaccine, which is given to all children as part of routine immunization protocol.

What are the symptoms?

- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Nausea and vomiting
- High fever
- Mental confusion
- Bulging soft spot on baby's head (fontanelle)

Symptoms may appear 3 to 4 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 treated?

A person diagnosed with bacterial meningitis generally requires hospitalization for intravenous (IV) antibiotic therapy. Individuals who are household members or other intimate contacts to the ill person may need treatment with a very short course of antibiotics to prevent development of disease.

How is it spread?

The bacteria that can cause meningitis are usually spread by direct person-to-person contact with the nasal discharge or oral secretions (saliva) of an infected person through kissing, drinking from a common container, or sharing eating utensils. They can also be spread through exposure to droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People in the same household or daycare center, or anyone with direct contact with an infected person's oral secretions are at increased risk of becoming infected.

How is bacterial meningitis prevented?

- Always wash your hands after touching any nasal or oral secretions.
- If you (or your child) develop signs or symptoms of meningitis, or if you think you have been exposed, call or see your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately for evaluation.
- There are two types of pneumococcal vaccines:
 - Y Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13) is given to infants as part of routine childhood immunizations.
 - Y Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV) is recommended for all adults 65 years of age and older. As well as for adults 19-64 years of age who smoke or have asthma.
- A vaccine for meningococcal meningitis (MCV4) is recommended for all children 11-12 years old. A booster shot should be given at 16 years of age in order to offer additional protection through later adolescence.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Wayne County Public Health at 734-727-7078.

Or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov