

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Reportable to local or state health department

Consult the health department before posting or distributing the Parent/Guardian fact sheet.

This disease most often affects children and young adults. Meningococcal disease is a medical emergency that requires prompt treatment. Vaccination may help prevent some cases of this illness. Often referred to as “bacterial meningitis”.

CAUSE *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria.

SYMPTOMS **Bacteremia** - sudden onset of fever, chills, and tiredness; sometimes a rash.
Meningitis - fever, vomiting, headache, stiff neck, extreme sleepiness, confusion, irritability, and lack of appetite; sometimes a rash or seizures.

SPREAD Spread through direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of an infected or colonized person (e.g., through kissing; sharing food, beverages, toothbrushes, or cigarettes). Spread is more common among people with close personal contact or in households, childcare settings, or schools where there is close prolonged physical contact.

INCUBATION It takes 1 to 10 days, but usually 3 to 4 days, from the time a person is exposed to the bacteria until symptoms begin.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD Until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins.

EXCLUSION Childcare and School: Until the child has been on appropriate antibiotics for at least 24 hours and is well enough to participate in routine activities.

The childcare provider or school may choose to exclude exposed staff and attendees until preventive treatment has been started, or if there is concern that individuals will not follow through with recommended preventive treatment.

DIAGNOSIS Laboratory tests can be done to detect *N. meningitidis*.

TREATMENT Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria and can be treated with antibiotics. Exposed persons should contact a health care provider at the first signs of meningococcal disease.

Household contacts and other close contacts of a meningococcal case should be put on preventive antibiotics (prophylaxis). Consult with the health department before recommending prophylaxis.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Public health will make recommendations to the childcare, school, and other contacts. Antibiotics and/or vaccine may be recommended.

PREVENTION/CONTROL (CONTINUED)

- Antibiotics to prevent meningitis are recommended for:
 - Household contacts
 - Overnight visitors to the household
 - Persons who had contact with the secretions from the mouth or throat through:
 - kissing
 - sharing food (eating from the same utensils, plate, etc.)
 - sharing beverages (drinking from the same cup, can, glass, or straw)
 - sharing cigarettes, cigars, snuff, pipes, etc.
 - sharing lip balm, lipstick, lip gloss, etc.
 - Sharing a toothbrush.

The following activities **are not** considered direct contact with the person with meningitis: sharing a book or pencil, walking down the hall, riding the bus, or sitting or standing next to them.

- Persons who have been exposed should remain under medical observation because preventive antibiotics are not always completely effective. If an exposed person develops a fever, they should call their health care provider immediately.
- Do not allow sharing of eating utensils and drinking containers. Encourage children to have their own water bottles.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces. Clean and disinfect other items or surfaces that come in contact with secretions from the nose or mouth (see Section 2).
- There are two vaccines to prevent *Neisseria meningitidis*: Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (MPSV4) and meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4). The vaccines are highly effective at preventing four of the strains of bacteria that cause meningococcal meningitis. However, the vaccine takes some time to take effect and is not considered a substitute for antibiotics following a high risk exposure.
 - MPSV4 vaccine is recommended for certain high risk adults over the age of 55 years.
 - MCV4 vaccine is routinely recommended for all 11 to 12 year olds and certain high risk children from the ages of 2 to 12 years. The vaccine is also recommended for 13 to 18 year olds who did not receive it previously and also for unvaccinated college freshman living in dormitories.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

