



MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS 101

An Overview for Parents, Teachers, Students and Communities

2013



Meningococcal Disease Fast Facts

- **Meningococcal disease is the result of a rare, but serious bacterial infection**
 - It can occur as meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord), bacteremia (blood infection), or pneumonia¹
 - Of these three types of the disease, people are most familiar with meningococcal meningitis, which is also the most common of the three²
 - Once contracted, meningococcal meningitis can claim the life of an otherwise healthy individual in as little as one day after the first symptoms appear^{2,3}
- **Meningococcal disease is spread through common, everyday activities**
 - The bacteria are spread through contact with respiratory secretions (saliva) and can be transmitted when a person coughs or sneezes¹
 - Everyday activities, such as kissing; sharing utensils and water bottles; being in close quarters, such as cramped locker rooms, and taking long bus trips can increase the risk of exposure to the germs^{2,4,5,6,7}
- **There are vaccines that can help protect against meningococcal meningitis**



Myths and Facts About Meningococcal Disease

Myth:

There is only one kind of meningitis



Fact:

There are several types of meningitis; two of the most common categories are viral and bacterial

- **Viral meningitis infections are usually caused by common viruses, including some of the same viruses that cause mumps, herpes and stomach problems**
 - Normally, viral meningitis is less severe than bacterial meningitis
 - Viral meningitis cannot be treated with medicine, however the immune system can usually fight it off without any help⁸
- **Bacterial meningitis is often caused by three different bacteria: *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, also known as “Hib;” Pneumococcus and meningococcus**
 - Meningococcal bacteria cause meningococcal meningitis, sometimes referred to as simply “bacterial meningitis,” but not all “bacterial meningitis” is caused by the meningococcus bacteria
 - Meningococcal meningitis progresses quickly and can be much more damaging than viral meningitis, even fatal



Myths and Facts About Meningococcal Disease

Myth:

There is no way to protect against contracting meningococcal disease



Fact:

There are healthy behaviors that can help protect against contracting the disease, as well as vaccines that are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 11 or 12 year olds, with a booster dose recommended at 16 years of age¹



Who is at Risk of Contracting Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal disease occurs in all age groups, but infants, adolescents, young adults and people 65 years of age and older are at increased risk⁹

Following infancy, there is a second peak in meningococcal disease incidence among adolescents and young adults between 16 and 21 years of age¹





How it Spreads



The bacteria are spread through contact with respiratory secretions (saliva) and can be transmitted when a person coughs or sneezes¹

- As a result, the disease can be spread through common everyday activities, such as kissing; sharing utensils and water bottles; being in close quarters, such as cramped locker rooms and taking long bus rides^{2,4,5,6,7}



How it Spreads

- Athletes can be at greater risk of exposure to the bacteria, because of cramped locker rooms and long bus trips to games^{5,6}
- Fatigue may also put people at greater risk of meningococcal disease, possibly by weakening the immune system⁷



Is it Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal disease can be difficult to recognize in its early stages, because the symptoms are similar to those of common viral illnesses, such as the flu

The most common symptoms in individuals older than five years of age include stiff neck (not being able to touch chin to chest), fever, lethargy, sensitivity to light, irritability, headaches, vomiting, confusion and delirium³

As many as 30 percent of patients with meningococcal disease present without distinct signs of meningitis or severe blood infection; patients are usually admitted to the hospital with only fever and a “rash”²



Impact of Meningococcal Disease

- 10 to 15 percent of the 800 to 1,200 Americans who get meningococcal disease each year will pass away from the disease¹
- Of those who survive, nearly one in five are left with serious medical problems, including^{1,9}:
 - Amputation of arms, legs, fingers or toes
 - Neurologic damage
 - Deafness
 - Kidney damage




Amy Purdy,
Meningitis Survivor

"I lost both of my legs, my kidneys, my spleen, part of my hearing, and almost my life to meningitis. And I'm one of the lucky ones."



Carye Wynn,
Meningitis Survivor

"I was in the hospital for a month and on life support for 15 days. My surviving meningitis was a miracle."




What to do if You Suspect Meningococcal Disease



The time between infection and onset of meningococcal disease is typically three to four days, with a range of two to 10 days¹⁰

Because this disease progresses quickly after the first signs appear, it is important to be evaluated by a health care provider and start treatment as soon as possible³

Although rare, meningococcal disease is potentially fatal and should always be viewed as a medical emergency



How to Prevent Meningococcal Meningitis

Even though the disease is rare, it can result in severe, permanent disabilities and death, so it is important to take every precaution to help protect against it

Behavioral

Do not share water bottles, utensils, share “bites” of your food, instruments with mouthpieces, etc.

Try to stay away from friends who are displaying flu-like symptoms

Get sufficient rest

Medical¹

Health officials recommend routine vaccination of adolescents, with a first dose at 11 or 12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years

Getting the booster, which is sometimes overlooked, is critical to provide protection through adolescence into young adulthood



The Importance of Vaccination

Meningococcal vaccination is the best approach to preventing meningococcal disease

Meningococcal vaccines are estimated to be up to 85 percent effective at preventing meningococcal disease; however, protection wanes over time, so it is important that adolescents get the recommended booster dose¹

Speak With Your Health Care Provider

Every Health Care Visit Is A Vaccination Opportunity

- ✓ Routine visits
- ✓ Sports physicals
- ✓ Pre-adolescent health care visits
- ✓ Annual back-to-school checkups
- ✓ Pre-college physicals
- ✓ Sick visits for minor illnesses



Shara Johnson,
Mother

"My son lost his feet and fingers to a disease I knew nothing about. Every parent should talk to their child's health-care provider about vaccination."



Olga Pasick,
Mother

"My son didn't have to die. If David had been vaccinated, he might still be here today."



GET IN THE GAME

KEEPING TEENS HEALTHY

 Powered by Voices of Meningitis™

Get in the Game is a national campaign powered by Voices of Meningitis™ to help educate parents on the danger and prevention of meningococcal meningitis, and motivate them to speak with their children's health care provider about a meningococcal vaccine in advance of sports season



For more information,
visit www.facebook.com/VoicesofMeningitis



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