



Meningococcal Disease

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is any illness caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis* and can also include infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and bloodstream infection (bacteremia or septicemia).

How is the bacteria that causes meningococcal disease spread?

Neisseria meningitidis can live in the upper respiratory tract without causing any visible signs of illness in an estimated one out of ten people (this is called a “carrier state”). However, the bacteria can be triggered to enter the body, therefore resulting in a case of meningococcal “disease”. The bacteria are spread to others who are in close proximity to the infected individual, through respiratory and throat secretions. Close proximity is one to three feet for 30 or more minutes AND sharing oral secretions with the individual, such as sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, toothbrushes and kissing. According to the NC Division of Public Health, simply sitting next to an infected individual does NOT constitute a high risk contact.

What are the signs and symptoms?

When signs are present, they may include:

- fever
- a spotty red or purple rash
- headache and/or neck stiffness
- person looks very sick
- confusion or coma
- shock
- bleeding under the skin and into tissues

How do you know if someone has meningococcal disease?

A medical diagnosis is made by testing blood or other body fluids.

How is meningococcal disease treated?

A person with meningococcal disease may need to be admitted to a hospital’s intensive care unit. Treatment may include intravenous fluids (IV) and antibiotics, breathing support, medications for blood pressure, blood clotting or platelets and wound care for skin with blood clots. Isolation of the person will occur for the first 24 hours to avoid spreading the bacteria to others. Prognosis is generally good if treatment is received early.

Should close contacts be treated?

Yes. Prophylaxis (preventive antibiotics) will be offered to family members and other close contacts.

Can meningococemia be prevented?

There are three types of meningococcal vaccines available in the United States and the indications for each type of vaccine are slightly different. All 11 to 12-year-old children should be vaccinated with a single dose of a vaccine that can help prevent four types (serogroups A, C, W and Y) of meningococcal infection, (Menactra® or Menveo®). Since protection may decrease over time, a booster dose is recommended at age 16.

A serogroup B meningococcal vaccine (Bexsero® or Trumenba®) may be given to teens ages 16 to 23 years and two or three doses are indicated, depending on the brand. The recommendation for this particular meningococcal vaccine is strongest for individuals at increased risk of meningococcal disease such as those with certain medical conditions or travel to areas with high numbers of cases.

For more information, contact Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777 or www.myguilford.com.

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/causes-transmission.html> and <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/who-vaccinate.htm>

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