



BACTERIAL MENINGITIS FACT SHEET

What is bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is a serious infection that affects the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Many kinds of bacteria may cause meningitis, but the most common types are:

- *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Pneumococcus)
- *Neisseria meningitidis* (Meningococcus)
- *Haemophilus Influenzae* (HIB)

How can you be exposed to bacterial meningitis?

Some forms of bacterial meningitis are more contagious than others. However, anyone can become exposed to the bacteria that cause meningitis by direct contact to nose or throat fluids of an infected person. This can occur by coughing, kissing, sharing utensils or drinking glasses, etc.

What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?

In most children and adults the symptoms of bacterial meningitis are high fever, headache and stiff neck. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, confusion and sleepiness. However, in newborns and small infants, the symptoms of fever, headache and stiff neck may not occur or be hard to recognize. The infant may appear slow or inactive, may be irritable, or may have vomiting or poor feeding. As the disease progresses, patients may have more serious symptoms such as seizure, coma and death.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms will usually appear within 2 to 10 days with 3 to 4 days being the most common.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to bacterial meningitis?

If you have been exposed to someone with bacterial meningitis, you may need medication. If you or a family member has any of the above symptoms, see a doctor right away.

How is bacterial meningitis treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat bacterial meningitis. Some forms of bacterial meningitis can quickly become a very serious illness and treatment should begin as soon as possible.

How can bacterial meningitis be prevented?

Adults and children should wash their hands after sneezing and coughing, before eating or when hands are dirty. People should avoid sharing eating utensils, drinking cups or anything that would help the spread of nose and throat fluids. Vaccines are available which can decrease the risk of developing HIB disease, pneumococcal or meningococcal meningitis. To prevent the spread of HIB and meningococcal disease, antibiotics can be given to close contacts. Medicine is not needed for people exposed to pneumococcal meningitis.

Where can I get more information on bacterial meningitis?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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