

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE FACT SHEET

What is meningococcal disease?

This is an infection that can affect the brain, spinal cord or blood. It is caused by an infection with the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. About 5-10% of the population may carry the bacteria in their noses and throats at any given time without becoming ill. These people are called "carriers".

What are the symptoms of an infection?

Symptoms will depend on the site of the infection. Generally, signs and symptoms may include sudden onset of fever, chills, feeling unusually weak or tired, stiff neck, headache, nausea, vomiting, mental confusion, sleepiness and being difficult to wake or a rash anywhere on the body.

Baby's symptoms are poor feeding, irritability, fever and sometimes vomiting. Any of these symptoms require immediate medical attention.

Is there treatment for this disease?

Yes, but treatment needs to begin as soon as possible as this disease can move quickly. Treatment includes antibiotics and almost always hospitalization.

How are the bacteria spread?

Saliva (spit) spreads the bacteria from person to person. You have to be in direct contact with the sick person's nose and throat secretions for the bacteria to spread. Direct contact includes:

- Sneezing
- Kissing on the mouth
- Sharing water bottles, glass, straws, eating utensils
- Sharing cigarettes, chapstick, lip balm

The bacteria are not spread by casual contact, such as sitting in the same room as an infected person or passing an infected person in a hallway or on the sidewalk.

What if I did have close (direct contact) with the sick person?

People who are household contacts of the sick person should contact their health care provider as soon as possible. Antibiotics are usually needed to prevent the disease. Daycare or nursery school children will also need to be given medicine to prevent the infection. Public Health will assist in determining who is at risk and who will need antibiotics.

Is there any way to prevent this disease?

All 11-12 years olds should be vaccinated with meningococcal conjugate vaccine. A booster dose should be given at age 16 years. For adolescents who receive the first dose at age 13 through 15 years, a one-time booster dose should be administered, preferably at age 16 through 18 years, before the peak in increased risk. Adolescents who receive their first dose of meningococcal vaccine at or after age 16 years do not need a booster dose. The new vaccine is also recommended for certain high-risk persons. The risk of disease may be reduced by not smoking, and by minimizing upper and lower lung infections. Get appropriate vaccines to reduce your risk of respiratory infection such as influenza and pneumococcal vaccine. Last but not least, good hand washing and covering your cough will go a long way in preventing illness for yourself and others.

For additional information contact Contra Costa Public Health at (925) 313-6740 or check our website at <http://cchealth.org/meningitis/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/>