

Meningococcal Disease

❑ WHAT IS IT?

Meningococcal diseases are infections caused by a bacterium named *Neisseria meningitidis* (also called the meningococcus). Meningococcal disease includes serious infections of the fluid and lining surrounding the brain (meningitis), bloodstream (bacteremia and sepsis), lungs (pneumonia), and joints (arthritis).

❑ SYMPTOMS

Symptoms include the following:

- ✓ Sudden high fever (usually 102° F or more)
- ✓ Chills
- ✓ Severe headache
- ✓ Difficulty breathing
- ✓ Stiff neck and back
- ✓ Painful joints
- ✓ Vomiting
- ✓ Extreme sleepiness and/or confusion
- ✓ Loss of consciousness/seizures
- ✓ Rash or bluish/purple splotches.
- ✓ In babies under one year of age, the soft spot on the top of the head (fontanel) may bulge upward.

❑ HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ✓ The bacteria is present in the noses and throats of ill persons and spread to close contacts through saliva or nose and throat secretions when talking, coughing, sneezing, kissing, etc.
- ✓ Healthy people who have no symptoms of illness sometimes carry the meningococcus in their noses and throats.
- ✓ Meningococcal infections are spread by close contact (for example, among household members) and are not spread simply by being in the same room with an infected person.
- ✓ Rarely, transmission occurs by sharing eating utensils, glassware, cigarettes, or toothbrushes.
- ✓ It takes one to ten days from the time a person is exposed to the bacteria for symptoms to occur.

❑ DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

- ✓ People with meningococcal disease frequently require hospitalization.
- ✓ The infection is diagnosed by testing the patient's blood or spinal fluid.
- ✓ All people who have had close contact with someone with meningococcal disease should:
 - 1) Be prescribed an antibiotic medicine by their health care provider as soon as possible to help prevent meningococcal disease.
 - 2) Watch for symptoms of meningococcal disease for 10 days after last contact with the ill person, even if they took antibiotics to prevent infection.
 - 3) Contact their health care provider right away if they develop fever, headache or other symptoms described on this sheet.

❑ PREVENTION

- ✓ In 2005 a new vaccine became available for persons between 11 and 55 years of age to protect against meningococcal disease. The vaccine is recommended for young adolescents at the 11 to 12 year checkup, adolescents at high school entry or 15 years of age (whichever comes first), college freshmen living in dormitory-style housing, and others at increased risk for meningococcal disease (contact your health care provider or local public health agency for more information).
- ✓ Vaccine may also be used by public health authorities in certain outbreak settings.
- ✓ Avoid close contact with persons having respiratory infections (who are coughing and sneezing).
- ✓ Avoid sharing food, drinks, cigarettes, or eating utensils.
- ✓ Wash hands before and after eating and after coughing or sneezing.

**Report all King County cases to
Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.**

Available in alternate formats.