

# Meningitis

## What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Many different germs cause the infection. Some of these are **viruses** and some are **bacteria**.

There are two main types of meningitis: viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis. The symptoms of both are so similar that medical tests are needed to tell the difference.

- **Viral meningitis (also known as Aseptic or Non-Bacterial Meningitis)** is the most common and least serious. It may be caused by a wide variety of common viruses including enteroviruses, herpes simplex, mumps and Epstein-barr viruses. Antibiotics have no effect. People with viral meningitis usually recover without treatment.
- **Bacterial meningitis**, although rare is an extremely serious infection. It has the potential to cause long term complications, such as deafness or brain injury, limb loss and even death. Bacterial meningitis requires immediate treatment with antibiotics. The most common types of bacterial meningitis are caused by Neisseria meningitidis, Streptococcus pneumoniae and Haemophilus influenzae type b bacteria.

## What are the symptoms of Meningitis?

- Someone with meningitis (Bacterial or Viral) will become ill quickly. Symptoms may develop in hours to 1 or 2 days. These include fever, feeling generally unwell, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and sensitivity to light (photophobia).
- Persons with this disease may become drowsy, excited or confused. Sometimes a body rash develops.

## How is Meningitis spread?

Meningitis is spread when people cough, sneeze or kiss. It can also be spread through saliva of an infected person when sharing items such as; cigarettes, lipstick, cups, water bottles, toothbrushes, mouth guards, food or beverages.

## Prevention and Control of Meningitis:

- In general, people should not share anything that has been in their mouth.
- Frequent hand washing (soap and water for at least 15 seconds), covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing and throw away any used tissues.
- If a person has had close contact with someone who is infected with bacterial meningitis, antibiotics may be required to prevent infection.
- Updated immunizations for Meningococcal, Pneumococcal and Haemophilus influenzae b are recommended.

*This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns*

*For further information, contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318  
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.*

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