

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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## Bacterial Meningitis

### What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is an infection of the fluid around the spinal cord or brain caused by a bacteria. By testing the fluid around the spine, a doctor can tell what is causing the meningitis. Many kinds of bacteria may cause meningitis, but the most common are:

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

### Who can get Bacterial Meningitis?

Anyone, at any age. However,

- Pneumococcus is more common in infants;
- Meningococcus is more common in children, teenagers and young adults;
- H-Flu can occur in infants and children, but is rare because of the HIB vaccine for children.
- Adults weakened by illness, medicine or old age can also become ill.

### How do you get Bacterial Meningitis?

By direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Kissing, sharing utensils, drinking glasses, etc. spread the infection.

### How long after exposure to the bacteria until the first signs of illness appear?

Can range from 1-10 days.

### What are the symptoms of Bacterial Meningitis?

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Vomiting/nausea
- Stiff neck and back
- Confusion
- Extreme weakness
- Bulging soft spots on a baby's head
- Seizure
- Coma

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## **What should I do if I see symptoms?**

See a doctor right away for diagnosis and treatment.

## **What is the treatment for Bacterial Meningitis?**

Antibiotics are given. Treatment will help you get well and keep the disease from spreading.

## **Can Bacterial Meningitis cause problems later?**

Yes. It's very important to see the doctor on a regular basis after leaving the hospital. Some problems may include:

- Hearing, vision, speech problems
- Muscle weakness
- Seizures
- Learning delays – physical or mental

## **Can Bacterial Meningitis be prevented?**

- Adults and children should wash their hands after touching any nose or throat fluid, before eating or when hands are soiled to decrease the chance of spreading the germs.
- A specific antibiotic can be given to household members and people in childcare settings who have been exposed to the H-Flu or meningococcus germs. None is given for pneumococcus.
- Vaccines against H-Flu disease and pneumococcus are given as part of the routine baby shots for infants and toddlers and are required for nursery or day care attendance.
- A vaccine against meningococcus is recommended for all adolescents at age 11-12 years.

**For more information on Bacterial Meningitis, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.**

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