

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. Bacterial meningitis is meningitis caused by one of several bacterium. Today, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Neisseria meningitides* are the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

Symptoms

- High fever, headache and stiff neck are common symptoms of meningitis in anyone over 2 years of age. These symptoms may develop over several hours, or they may take 1-2 days.
- Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, confusion and sleepiness.
- In newborns and small infants, the classic symptoms of fever, headache and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect and the infant may only appear slow or inactive, irritable, with vomiting or poor feeding.
- As the disease progresses, persons of any age may have seizures.

Transmission

- The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (coughing, kissing).
- Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as the common cold or the flu and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.
- People in the same household or child care center or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions would be considered at increased risk of acquiring the infection.

Treatment

- Bacterial meningitis is treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease.

Prevention

- There are vaccines against several of the bacterium that cause bacterial meningitis, including Hib, some strains of *N. Meningitidis*, and many types of *S. Pneumonia*.
- Certain bacteria require that contacts be given antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease.
- People in the same household or child care center or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions would be at increased risk of acquiring the infection.
- People who are close contacts of a person with meningitis caused by *N. Meningitidis* should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.