

BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Bacterial meningitis is generally more severe than viral meningitis and often requires hospitalization. Therefore, early diagnosis and treatment is important. A variety of bacteria can cause bacterial meningitis. Today, Streptococcus pneumoniae and Neisseria meningitides are the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

How is Bacterial Meningitis spread?

It is spread through the respiratory droplets of an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It can also be spread by direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person by kissing, sharing drinking glasses, water bottles, or eating utensils.

How is it treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment is very important. Seek a medical evaluation immediately if you develop symptoms of bacterial meningitis. Persons diagnosed with bacterial meningitis usually require hospitalization and treatment with antibiotics. Sometimes household members or very close contacts of the infected person are also treated with antibiotics to prevent the development of disease.

How can we prevent Bacterial Meningitis?

Refrain from sharing respiratory secretions with an infected person. Handwashing is important, especially after touching any oral or nasal secretions. If you have been directly exposed to someone who has been diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, consult with your doctor immediately.

Several vaccines are available to prevent bacterial meningitis. A routine childhood vaccine (Hib) has reduced the incidence of haemophilus meningitis by 99%. Pneumococcal vaccine (Prevnar) is recommended for infants and children to prevent pneumococcal meningitis. Meningococcal vaccine is recommended for high risk and increased risk populations and is also recommended for the control of outbreaks caused by vaccine preventable serogroups. Meningococcal vaccine is required for the 11-12 year olds. It is also recommended for adolescents 13-18 years of age not previously vaccinated and unvaccinated college freshmen living in a dormitory.

SYMPTOMS OF BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

- Sudden onset
- Symptoms develop in hours or 1-2 days
- High fever
- Rash
- Headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Nausea/vomiting
- Sensitivity to bright light
- Confusion
- Difficulty breathing
- Shock

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