

BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

What is bacterial meningitis?

Meningitis is a rare but serious infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses. The most common causes of bacterial meningitis in adults are *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Neisseria meningitidis* or *Haemophilus influenzae*.

What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?

- High fever
- Severe headache
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light

Other symptoms may include confusion, sleepiness and a rash, especially on the hands and feet. Infants may be irritable, refuse meals, have unusual sleep patterns and may constantly cry. Newborns and infants may also have the soft spots on their heads bulge and a lower than normal body temperature. Immediate medical attention is necessary if any of these symptoms are present.

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. A doctor may require tests to examine the fluid around the brain and spinal cord for bacteria. A blood test may also be completed to test for bacteria in the blood.

How does bacterial meningitis spread?

The bacteria that cause meningitis is spread through direct contact with secretions or droplets originating from the nose and throat, such as:

- Kissing
- Sharing drinks, utensils or cigarettes
- Living in close quarters, such as dorms and shelters
- Sleeping arrangements
- Children sharing toys

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How can bacterial meningitis be prevented?

The best way to prevent bacterial meningitis is through vaccination. Vaccines are available for:

- Meningococcus (*Neisseria meningitidis*)
- Pneumococcus (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*)
- Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)
- Group B Streptococcus

Other prevention tips:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions
- Screen for Group B Streptococcus during pregnancy and if positive, take antibiotics during labour
- See your doctor if you have had close contact with an infected person, as they may prescribe an antibiotic

How is bacterial meningitis treated?

Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics. If infected, a person is considered non-contagious after 24 to 48 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

York Region Public Health notifies close contacts of confirmed meningitis cases and recommends they visit a doctor to get a prescription for a specific antibiotic to prevent infection.