

Meningitis Information for College Students

Meningitis is: an infection of the fluid around the spinal cord and brain.

Meningitis symptoms: range from fever, headache and stiff neck to more severe symptoms such as confusion or seizures.

Meningitis causes: Meningitis is usually caused by a **bacteria** or a **virus**. Several types of bacteria or viruses can be responsible. Some types of meningitis can be very severe. Other types may get better in a day or so without any treatment.

Bacterial meningitis: is usually more severe than viral meningitis. You probably received vaccines for meningitis when you were very young. These days, entering freshmen are offered a vaccine against meningococcus. However, bacterial meningitis still occurs very rarely in young adults in congregate settings such as college. Bacterial meningitis can have serious after-effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, limb amputation, or learning disabilities. Bacterial meningitis usually does not spread from one person to another; however public health officials will advise some close contacts to take medicine to prevent illness if the meningitis is caused by meningococcus or Hib. Otherwise, medication is usually not necessary for close contacts.

Viral Meningitis: is usually less severe and most cases do not require treatment. Some types of viral meningitis may spread very easily between people. Other types do not spread easily at all.

What can I do if I know someone who has meningitis?

- Make sure your immunizations are up to date.
- Wash your hands regularly – especially after going to the bathroom or before handling food.
- Practice cough etiquette: Cough into your sleeve. Put used tissues in the trash. Wash hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Don't share drinking cups, utensils, cigarettes or other personal items.
- Your health department will notify you need to take medication. Medication is only recommended for some very close contacts in the case of meningitis caused by meningococcus or Hib.
- Consult your doctor if you are ill.

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