

# **Meningitis Information**

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## **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. Childhood vaccines against pneumococcus and Hib now prevent most of the meningitis that used to occur in young children. These days, teenagers are given a vaccine against meningococcus. However, bacterial meningitis still occurs very rarely in the very young, the very old and in persons with chronic conditions. 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 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?**

Your health department will notify you if your family needs to take medication.

Medication is only recommended in the case of meningitis caused by meningococcus or Hib. You should also:

- Make sure your family's immunizations are up to date. This is especially important for infants, teenagers, people aged 65 and older, or people with health conditions.
- Make sure everyone in your family washes his/her hands regularly – especially after going to the bathroom or before preparing food.
- Practice cough etiquette: Cough into your sleeve. Put used tissues in the trash. Wash hands after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Consult your family doctor if anyone in your family is ill.

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