

Meningitis



What is it?

Meningitis is an infection of the protective membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord.

There are two main types:

- ⦿ Viral meningitis
- ⦿ Bacterial meningitis (rarer but more serious)

Meningitis can be extremely serious if not treated quickly. It can lead to septicaemia and sepsis which can be life threatening.

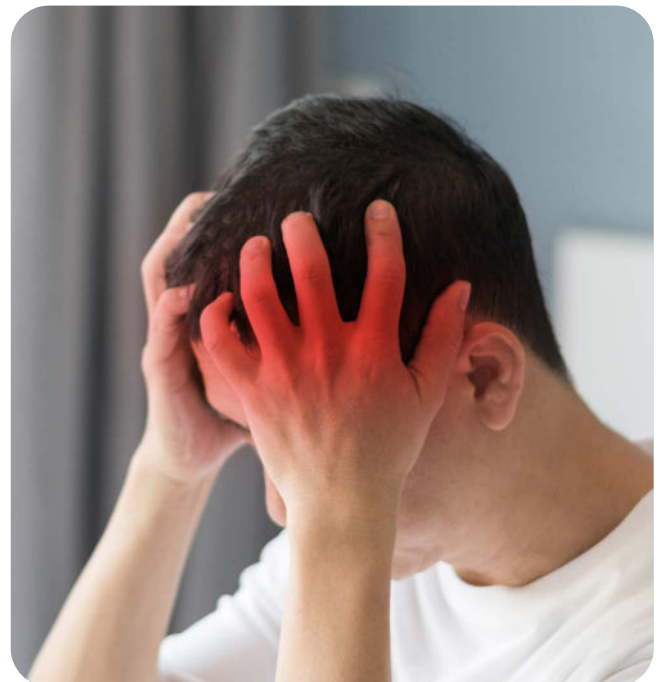
1 in every 6 cases of bacterial meningitis is fatal.

How does it spread?

The infection that causes meningitis can be spread through:

- ⦿ Sneezing
- ⦿ Coughing
- ⦿ Kissing

Meningitis spreads in a similar way to a cold, through close contact or lengthy contact with someone carrying the infection, who may not show any signs of infection themselves.



Antibiotics (and in some cases, vaccines) may be offered to close contacts to reduce the risk of further transmission.

Outbreaks sometimes happen in schools or places where people share living space, such as university halls.

Who is at risk?

Meningitis can affect anyone, however it is most common in babies, young children, teenagers and young adults.

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What are the symptoms of meningitis?

Symptoms develop suddenly and can include:

Primary Symptoms:

- ⦿ Severe and prolonged headache
- ⦿ A stiff neck
- ⦿ A high temperature
- ⦿ Altered mental state – confusion

Secondary symptoms:

- ⦿ Nausea and vomiting
- ⦿ A dislike of bright lights
- ⦿ Irritability
- ⦿ A rash that does not fade when a glass is rolled over it
- ⦿ Drowsiness or unresponsiveness
- ⦿ Seizures

Not all individuals will get all of the symptoms, and they can occur in any order.

Early signs and symptoms can seem similar to 'flu' or a stomach bug.



Symptoms of Septicaemia:

- ⦿ Fever and shivering
- ⦿ Severe pains and aches in limbs and joints
- ⦿ Vomiting
- ⦿ Very cold hands and feet
- ⦿ Pale or blotchy skin
- ⦿ Rapid breathing
- ⦿ Diarrhoea and stomach cramps
- ⦿ Red or purple 'bruised' or blotchy rash on skin that does not fade under pressure
- ⦿ Difficulty walking or standing
- ⦿ Severe sleepiness, losing consciousness

An individual with meningitis or septicaemia will usually become seriously ill in a matter of hours.

Therefore, it is very important to keep checking on someone who is ill so you know if they are rapidly getting worse and keep looking for the signs and symptoms.

What is the glass test?

Press the side of a clear drinking glass firmly against the rash so you can see if the rash fades and loses colour under pressure. If it does not change colour, seek help immediately.

On dark skin, check inside the eyelids or the roof of the mouth where the spots may be more visible.

Get help:

If you think you or someone else are displaying signs of meningitis you should **act fast**.

Call 999 or take them to your nearest A&E.

You should **not** wait for all the symptoms. Not everyone gets the rash.

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What is the treatment for meningitis?

The hospital will test for meningitis and the type; this can be a blood test or spinal tap.

Bacterial meningitis usually needs treatment in hospital. Treatments include antibiotics, fluids and oxygen.

Those treated quickly will usually make a full recovery.

However, some individuals can be left with serious complications, including:

- ⦿ Hearing loss or vision loss
- ⦿ Problems with memory and concentration
- ⦿ Recurrent seizures
- ⦿ Loss of limbs – if amputation is necessary due to sepsis

What can you do to reduce the risk of contracting meningitis?

Maintain a high level of hygiene at all times:

- ⦿ Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with soap and water. Dry your hands thoroughly after every wash
- ⦿ Wash your hands before eating and after using the bathroom
- ⦿ Do not share eating utensils, plates or glasses
- ⦿ Avoid close interaction with individuals who are sick. Use a face or surgical mask if you need to, and remember to wash your hands

Vaccinations:

There are a number of vaccinations available that offer some protection against meningitis.

You can find further information at:

- ⦿ [Meningitis Now](#)
- ⦿ [Meningitis Trust](#)