

**What is bacterial meningitis?**

Meningitis is an infection of the meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) caused by any one of a number of different bacteria, such as *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, group B streptococci, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Listeria*, and more. Almost all of the cases occur as single, isolated events.

**Who is at risk for bacterial meningitis?**

Anyone can get bacterial meningitis but it occurs most often in infants who are two months or older, people lacking a spleen or with decreased immunity, people living in group settings (i.e., military, college freshman living in dormitories) travelers to the meningitis belt of sub-Saharan Africa, or microbiologists.

**What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?**

The symptoms may include fever, headache, stiff neck and fatigue. Rash, sensitivity to light, confusion, sore throat and intestinal symptoms may also occur.

**How soon do symptoms appear?**

Depending on the type of bacteria that is causing the meningitis, symptoms usually appear within three to seven days after exposure.

**How is bacterial meningitis spread?**

Bacterial meningitis may be spread by direct or indirect contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person or by direct contact with an infected person.

**When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

Most people are able to spread the bacteria as long as organisms are found in the respiratory secretions/wounds and other anatomic sites.

**How is a person diagnosed?**

Usually the disease is identified by finding the bacteria in the spinal fluid or blood. For more information, consult a health care professional.

**What is the treatment?**

Antibiotics typically are used to treat bacterial meningitis.

## **Does past infection make a person immune?**

This may depend on the bacteria. Some bacteria, such as *haemophilus influenzae*, offer immunity after infection, while other bacteria do not.

## **Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have bacterial meningitis?**

Yes, people with bacterial meningitis should be excluded from child care, school and work until their doctor has determined they are no longer contagious. The infected person should also wash their hands thoroughly and often and remember to cover coughs and sneezes.

## **What can be done to prevent the spread of bacterial meningitis disease?**

Prevention for bacterial meningitis will depend on the bacteria. Children should be vaccinated against bacteria such as *Haemophilus influenzae B (Hib)* and *Streptococcal pneumonia (PCV13)*. Adolescents should be vaccinated against *Neisseria meningitidis (MCV4)*. General guidelines for the prevention of bacterial meningitis include not sharing food items, drinks or eating utensils, good hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.

### **Additional Information:**

Additional information is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/disease](http://www.ndhealth.gov/disease) or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resource:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/meningitis/bacterial.html](http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/bacterial.html)