

MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS FACT SHEET

Definition:

Meningococcal meningitis is a severe, contagious life-threatening infection of the meninges, which are the three layers of membranes (dura mater, arachnoid, and the pia mater) between the skull and the brain.

Meningococcal meningitis is caused by *Neisseria Meningitidis*, gram-negative diplococcal bacteria, or multiple serogroups: A, B, C, Y, and W-135.

Bacterial meningitis is caused by *Haemophilus influenzae type b* or *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Viral Meningitis (aseptic) is caused by *Enterovirus*; fungi are caused by *Cryptococcus*. Meningitis may also be caused by drug allergies.

What are the Symptoms?

The signs of Meningococcal meningitis are: stiff neck, high fever, headache, vomiting or nausea with headache, sensitivity to light, confusion, seizures.

The signs of Meningococcal septicemia are: fever, chills, malaise, prostration, rash (macular, maculopapular or petechial), purpura, Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation (blood clots throughout body), leading to shock.

How is Meningitis Spread?

It is spread by respiratory secretions, through kissing, sneezing, coughing, sharing eating utensils, sharing cigarettes, eye secretions (for primary meningococcal conjunctivitis), mouth to mouth resuscitation, copious secretions during intubation (if no personal protective equipment worn)

The incubation period is 1 to 10 days, usually less than 4 days. An infected person can spread meningococcal meningitis from the onset of symptoms until after 24 hours of effective antibiotic treatment.

How is it Diagnosed?

It is diagnosed through blood cultures, CSF cultures, with a gram stain of blood or CSF showing gram-negative intracellular diplococci. A throat swab is not diagnostic, as *N. meningitidis* can be carried as normal flora in the throat.

Infection Control

- Hand Hygiene
- Avoid exposure to high-risk individuals
- Don't share food or drinks with individuals who are ill
- Avoid exposure to persons with respiratory disease
- For Meningitis of unknown etiology, contact precautions are in effect for children.
- For any Meningococcal Disease, droplet precautions are in effect for all patients, until 24 hours after appropriate therapy.
- Confirm vaccinations
- Clarify type of meningitis. Viral, fungal and most bacterial types need no follow up.

Information Sources:

US National Library of Medicine. Medline.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000573.htm>

American Public Health Association. Meningitis In: Heymann DL, ed. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 18th ed. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association; 2004: 357-371.