



# Fact Sheet: Bacterial Meningitis

## What is Bacterial Meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Bacteria or viruses can cause meningitis. Bacterial meningitis is generally more severe and may require hospitalization. There are many different bacteria that can cause meningitis but the two main ones are:

*Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcal meningitis) and *Neisseria meningitides* (meningococcal meningitis).

## What are the symptoms?

- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever and chills
- Mental confusion
- Bulging soft spot on baby's head
- Progression to unresponsiveness and coma, if untreated

Symptoms usually appear 3 to 4 days after exposure. However, many people can be infected with the bacteria and have no symptoms at all.

## How is it treated?

A person diagnosed with bacterial meningitis generally requires hospitalization for intravenous (IV) antibiotic therapy. Individuals who are household members or other intimate contacts to the ill person require treatment with a very short course of antibiotics to prevent development of disease.

## How is it spread?

Bacterial meningitis is usually spread by direct contact with the nasal discharge or oral secretions (saliva) of an infected person through kissing, drinking from a common container, or sharing eating utensils. It can also be spread through exposure to droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

## How is bacterial meningitis prevented?

- Always wash your hands after touching any nasal or oral secretions.
- If you (or your child) develop signs or symptoms of meningitis or if you think you have been exposed, see your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately for evaluation.
- Vaccines are available to prevent several different types of bacterial meningitis.
- The vaccine that prevents Haemophilus meningitis (Hib vaccine) is now given to all children as part of routine childhood immunization. The pneumococcal vaccine (Prevnar) is given to infants and can prevent pneumococcal meningitis.
- A vaccine for meningococcal meningitis recommended for students entering college, especially those who will be living in dormitories.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or 257-3612*

Visit our website at: [www.gchd.us](http://www.gchd.us) or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Genesee County Health Department**  
630 S. Saginaw Street  
Flint, Michigan 48502-1540

"Better Life through Better Health"