

Meningococcal Meningitis and Meningococemia



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH

Meningococcal meningitis and meningococemia are rare, but serious infections caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitides*. Bacteria enter the body through the nose and throat and may cause an infection of the bloodstream (meningococemia) and/or the lining of the brain (meningitis) and spinal cord. Most of these infections occur as “isolated” cases and spread of the infection to other persons is rare. However, there is a risk that infection may occur in persons who have had close contact with the sick person. For this reason, certain recommendations about preventive antibiotics are made to these close contacts.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of meningitis or meningococemia include a fever, feeling generally unwell, headache, vomiting and stiff neck. A body rash is common, and may look like pinpoints or bruising or larger bruise-like areas. Quick medical attention and treatment with antibiotics is necessary to treat these infections.

How it is spread?

The bacteria is found in saliva and mucus and is spread from person to person by direct saliva contact such as kissing or sharing items such as eating utensils, cigarettes or cans of pop.

Who should receive preventative antibiotics?

Preventive antibiotics are usually recommended for household and close, intimate contacts of affected cases, since they have an increased risk of infection. People (such as classmates or co-workers) who have had casual contact with an infected person usually do not need preventative antibiotics.

When a case of meningococcal disease is reported to public health, staff will quickly identify and contact persons who may have been exposed to the disease and provide specific recommendations to them.

How can I prevent this infection?

There are several vaccines available that prevent some of the strains of the meningococcal bacteria. Some of these are part of the routine child and school vaccination schedule. Check with your health care provider or public health department for more information.

When should a doctor be consulted?

Persons who develop a fever with any of the symptoms listed should consult a health care provider as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about meningococcal meningitis or meningococemia, talk to your health care provider or call the Infectious Diseases Program at the number below.

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Region of Waterloo Public Health

Infectious Diseases Program

519-575-4400