

Think About Protecting Your Teen. Think Meningococcal Disease.
Information for Adolescents and Their Parents About Meningococcal Disease

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but potentially fatal bacterial infection that can cause meningitis – severe swelling of the brain and spinal cord or meningococemia – a serious blood infection. Meningococcal disease is caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria meningitides*.¹

How is the disease spread?

The disease is spread through the exchange of fluids found in the respiratory system and throat (such as saliva or “spit”), usually through close, personal contact with someone who is infected. It is thought that certain social behaviors involving close personal contact such as sharing drinking glasses or water bottles, kissing, smoking (active or passive), or being in crowded situations may put young people at greater risk for getting meningococcal disease.¹⁻⁴

Why is it so dangerous?

Meningococcal disease often begins with symptoms that look like other common viral illnesses such as the flu. However, unlike more common infections, meningococcal disease can get worse very rapidly, and it can kill an otherwise healthy person in 48 hours or less.⁵⁻⁷ In fact, up to 1 in 5 people who get meningococcal disease will die.^{2,3,5,8} Of those who survive, 1 in 5 will suffer from permanent disabilities such as limb amputation, severe scarring, brain damage, and hearing loss.^{3,5,6}

Who is at risk?

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that meningococcal disease rates begin to rise during adolescence and peak between the ages of 15 to 24 years.⁹ Moreover, death rates from meningococcal disease are up to 5 times higher among adolescents and young adults (15 to 24 years old) compared with younger populations.^{8, 10}

Can Meningococcal disease be prevented?

Yes. Although meningococcal disease is serious and potentially life threatening, up to 83% of the cases in adolescents and young adults are potentially vaccine preventable.^{2,8,11} The meningococcal vaccine has been demonstrated to be safe, and offers protection against 4 of the 5 most common strains of bacteria that cause the disease.

Knowing the warning signs of meningococcal disease is critical and potentially lifesaving.

Signs and Symptoms of Meningitis¹

- Headache
 - Fever
 - Stiff neck
 - Extreme tiredness
 - Vomiting
 - Sensitivity to light
 - Rash of small purplish black-red dots
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Remember:

Time is critical when it comes to treating meningococcal disease. **Contact your doctor or seek medical attention** if you suspect meningococcal disease.

Where can I get more information?

- CDC at www.cdc.gov
- National Meningitis Association at www.nmaus.org
- National Foundation of Infectious Diseases at www.nfid.org/ncai
- www.meningococcaldisease.com

Be aware that there are risks associated with all vaccines. Vaccines should not be given to those with known hypersensitivities to any vaccine component. Additionally, vaccination may not protect 100% of individuals.

References:

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