



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Meningococcal Meningitis

(Bacterial meningitis)

What is meningococcal meningitis?

Meningococcal meningitis is a life-threatening infection of the protective covering of the brain and spinal cord. It is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria.

How do you get it?

You get meningococcal meningitis by direct contact with fluids from the nose and throat of persons who are infected. It is not spread by casual contact or by breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. Approximately 10- 25% of people normally carry the bacteria in their nose and throat, but only a few of those who have the bacteria ultimately develop symptoms of the disease. People can transmit the disease without having any symptoms.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal meningitis?

Symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, vomiting, neck stiffness, and rash. Bacterial meningitis is a very serious illness. Up to 20% of those infected will die, and many others may have permanent hearing loss, mental retardation, loss of limbs, or other debilitating effects.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 5 days after exposure to the bacteria but can range from 2 to 10 days.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with meningococcal infection may be contagious for as long as symptoms are present. After one day of antibiotic treatment, the person is no longer contagious to others.

What is the treatment for this disease?

Doctor prescribed antibiotic treatment is required. People with symptoms of meningitis should see a doctor as soon as possible. In addition, persons who

have been in close contact with the infected person (including household members, playmates at day care centers, etc.), may need preventive treatment. Generally, persons who have had only limited, indirect contact (such as students in a classroom, co-workers), do not need preventive therapy.

Is there a vaccine for this disease?

Yes. In February 2005, the CDC recommended a new vaccine for use in the US to prevent meningococcal disease. This vaccine protects against four of the five different types of meningococemia. The new vaccine is recommended for all children at 11-12 years of age or at high school entry. The vaccine is also recommended for college freshmen living in dormitories, laboratory workers, military recruits, those living or traveling to areas where meningococcal disease is common, and those with weakened immune systems.

Should a student with meningococcal meningitis stay home from work or school?

The person may return to work or school as soon as he or she recovers following treatment.

How can you keep from spreading it?

All suspected persons with the disease should see a doctor as soon as possible for early diagnosis and treatment.

If a case is reported, closely monitor all close contacts for early signs of illness (especially fever).

Any suspected cases of meningococcal meningitis should be promptly reported to the Department of Health.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.htm>