

# Get the Facts: Bacterial Meningitis

## What is Bacterial meningitis?

Meningitis is an infectious disease leading to inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Bacterial meningitis is a severe and deadly disease. It can result in death in as little as a few hours. Though most individuals can recover from meningitis, permanent disabilities including hearing loss, learning disabilities, and brain damage, can result from the infection. Bacterial meningitis is caused by numerous types of bacteria in the United States, including group B Streptococcus, Haemophilus influenzae, Listeria monocytogenes, Neisseria meningitidis, Escherichia Coli, and Streptococcus pneumoniae.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of bacterial meningitis include Sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light, and altered mental status (confusion). Later symptoms include seizures and coma. These symptoms can appear quickly or over several days normally within 3-7 days after exposure. Symptoms in children may be different from that of adult. Children may be slow or inactive, irritable, feed poorly, vomit, have bulging fontanel (soft spot on a baby's head), and have abnormal reflexes.

## How long does this disease last?

Symptoms of bacterial meningitis may occur 3 to 7 days after exposure. In TB meningitis exposed persons can develop symptoms much later after exposure to the bacterial.

## How is bacterial meningitis spread?

Bacterial meningitis is spread through direct contact with the respiratory secretions from contaminated objects such as sharing food utensils and drinking glasses or by kissing. Children exposed to bacterial meningitis should receive meningococcal vaccine based on Centers for Disease Control and Preventions' recommendations.

## Who is at risk for bacterial meningitis infection?

Some risk factors for bacterial meningitis include: Young age (Babies); people in community setting (where large groups of people gather); persons with certain medical conditions such as HIV, medications, and surgical procedures, elders may be at increased risk for meningococcal disease caused by N. Meningitidis, and persons who work with meningitis causing bacterial such as microbiologists.

## What preventive measures and treatments are available?

Various antibiotics are available to treat Bacterial meningitis. Ill persons should seek treatment as soon as possible. Vaccination is the most effective way to protect yourself and your child against certain types of bacterial meningitis. There is vaccine available for three types of bacteria that can cause meningitis including: Neisseria meningitidis; Streptococcus pneumoniae; and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib). To help decrease the spread of bacterial meningitis, antibiotics may be recommended for: Close contacts and family members of infected persons. Also, your doctor or CDPH will tell you if there's a person at increased risk in your house that may need antibiotics. Get plenty of rest, avoid smoking and/or cigarette smoke, and don't come into close contact with infected persons.

### What should schools do?

Report the infection to the designated staff at your school for decision-making. The designated school staff notify exposed family and staff to watch for symptoms and communicate with health care providers and parents to differentiate if it is bacterial or viral meningitis. Report to CDPH if bacterial meningitis. Encourage good hand hygiene, teach children and staff to cover their mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing, and dispose of facial tissue.

### What are recommendations for exclusion?

Exclude the child or staff as soon as it is suspected; readmit the child after being cleared by the health provider, when a child is able to participate or staff determines they cannot compromise their ability to care for other children.

For more information, visit [Bacterial Meningitis | CDC](#) or [Meningitis - Symptoms and Causes | Mayo Clinic](#).

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