

Meningitis

What is meningitis?

Meningitis (men-in-JI-tiss) is an infection or irritation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by an infection, a medicine, or a cancer.

What are the symptoms?

You may have neck soreness, a fever, a headache, or overall tiredness. Some people have confusion, seizures, or weakness. Babies may be fussy, overly sleepy, stiff, limp, or eat less than their normal amount.

Who can get it?

Anyone can get it, but it is more common in children younger than one year and in adults older than 60 years. It can spread by being close to someone with the infection who is coughing, which is why teenagers and college students living in dorms are at a higher risk of getting it. You can also get meningitis if you kiss or share drinks with someone who is infected.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you questions and do an exam. If your doctor thinks you may have meningitis, you will need to go to the hospital for more testing. At the hospital, they will order blood tests and a lumbar puncture. A lumbar puncture is when a needle is used to get fluid

from around the spine. This will help the doctor know if you have an infection. It will also show what type of infection it is. Sometimes a CT scan is needed to take pictures of your head.

How is it treated?

If a bacteria or fungus is causing the meningitis, the infection is serious. You will need to be in the hospital for treatment with IV medicine (not from a pill). You will need the medicine for at least one week. It may take a few days in the hospital to get well enough to go home. If a virus is causing the infection, you may get better without medicine. Your doctor will talk to you about what type of infection you have.

What can I expect?

Most people get better if the meningitis is treated. Some adults have seizures, weakness in an arm or leg, or other nervous system problems. Children can have developmental delay, hearing loss, seizures, or other nervous system problems. About 5% to 15% of people who have a serious infection die.

What can I do to prevent it?

Get all the vaccines that your doctor recommends. Avoid close contact, such as kissing or sharing cups or utensils, with a person who has meningitis. If you are around someone who has meningitis, you can take medicine to prevent



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getting it. Call your doctor if you have been in close contact with someone who has meningitis.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/who-vaccinate.htm>

National Institutes of Health
<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Meningitis-and-Encephalitis-Information-Page>

U.S. National Library of Medicine: MedlinePlus
<https://medlineplus.gov/meningitis.html>

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Notes:

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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