

Meningococcal (Invasive) Disease

What is Meningococcal (invasive) disease?

Meningococcal (invasive) disease is an infection caused by meningococcus bacteria. In rare cases, meningococcal bacteria overcome the body's natural defenses and cause serious illness, including meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or septicemia (infection of the blood).

What are the symptoms of Meningococcal (invasive) disease?

Symptoms occur two to 10 days (typically three to four days) after exposure and may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to bright lights, confusion, drowsiness, a small purplish rash, irritability. Severe cases can result in coma and if untreated, shock and death.

How is Meningococcal (invasive) disease spread?

The bacteria are spread through direct contact with droplets from the nose or throat (saliva) of an infected person. This can be from kissing, coughing, sneezing, or sharing any of the following: food (utensils), drinks (drinking glasses, water bottles, and straws), toothbrushes, cigarettes, or lipstick. Approximately 5-10% of the population carries the bacteria at the back of their throat or nose without being sick. These individuals can sometimes spread the infection to others and very few actually get sick.

How is Meningococcal (invasive) disease diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on symptoms and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of Meningococcal (invasive) disease?

Although the disease can occur at all ages, the highest risk for infection is among children under 12 months of age which is followed by teenagers 15-19 years of age and immune compromised patients including those that have had their spleens removed.

How can Meningococcal (invasive) disease be prevented?

You can reduce your risk of infection by not sharing drinks, eating utensils, lipsticks, cigarettes, etc; and practice good personal hygiene by frequent hand washing with soap and water or use of antibacterial hand sanitizers.

If you have been in direct contact with a person with meningococcal infection, you should see a health care provider.

Immunize

There are three types of vaccines that protect against sub-types of meningococcal bacteria.

- The Men-C vaccine protects against infection from one of the most common types of meningococcal bacteria type C. It's free for children and given at the same time as other childhood vaccinations at 12 months of age.
- The meningococcal quadrivalent vaccine protects against infection from four of the most common types of meningococcal bacteria A/C/Y/W-135. It is offered routinely to students in grade nine. The vaccine is also free and recommended for all adolescents and young adults, born on or after 1990, who missed their dose in grade nine; and for individuals with specific medical conditions that put them at high risk of getting sick with meningococcal bacteria.
- The Men-B vaccine protects against infection by one of the most common types of meningococcal bacteria, type B. This vaccine is not part of the routine immunization schedule. However it is publicly funded for high risk individuals in New Brunswick.

How is Meningococcal (invasive) disease treated?

Meningococcal infection is treated with antibiotics and is most effective if started as soon as the infection is suspected. Preventative treatment may also be required for those exposed to the illness. Consult your health care provider.

What is Public Health's response?

Health care providers, hospitals, laboratories and some institutions are required to notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who are at risk of infection (ie. close contacts of individuals infected with meningococcal disease), provide advice as necessary, and ensure that control measures are started (antibiotics and immunization).

Further information

Please contact your health care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811

Related Links

- Tele-Care 811
- Regional Health Protection Branch Offices http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/healthy_environments/content/regional_branch_offices.html
- Immunization <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/immunization.html>

Resources

- Protect your child against meningococcal disease brochure <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/en/CDC/Immunization/ProtectYourChildAgainstMeningococcalDisease.pdf>