

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease refers to any illness caused by the type of bacteria (germs) called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Meningococcal disease may result in inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and/or a serious blood infection (septicemia).

About 5-20% of people carry this type of bacteria in their nose and throat and do not get sick from them. Sometimes, though, these bacteria can invade the body and cause meningococcal disease.

## How do people get meningococcal disease?

People spread meningococcal bacteria by sharing respiratory and throat secretions (saliva or spit). It is not as contagious (easily spread) as the cold or flu.

The disease spreads during **close or lengthy contact**. Some examples include:

- Living in the same household
- Kissing
- Coughing and sneezing
- Sharing eating utensils, food, drinks, etc.



## What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

- Confusion
- Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- Headache
- High fever
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light
- Stiff neck



## Who can get meningococcal disease?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but certain groups are at increased risk. These include:

- Preteens and teens
- College students and military recruits living in dorms or barracks
- People with certain medical conditions or immune system disorders
- People who may have been exposed to meningococcal disease during an outbreak
- International travelers

Young adults, between the ages of 16 and 23, have the highest rates of meningococcal disease in the United States.

## What can happen if I get meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is serious; even with treatment, the disease may result in death. Of those who live, about 20% will lose their arms or legs, experience kidney damage, become deaf, or suffer seizures or strokes. Early diagnosis and treatment are important.

## How can you prevent meningococcal disease?

The best way to prevent meningococcal disease is to get vaccinated. There are three types of meningococcal vaccines used in the United States. Each type helps protect against different serogroups (strains) of meningococcal bacteria (A, B, C, W, Y).

- Meningococcal Conjugate (MenACWY)
- Serogroup B or MenB vaccines
- Pentavalent or MenABCWY vaccines

## Are meningococcal vaccines safe?

Meningococcal vaccines may cause mild side effects, like redness and soreness at the injection site. Fainting may occur after vaccination, especially in adolescents. To prevent injury from fainting, it is recommended to sit or lie down during and after the vaccination.

