

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

MENINGITIS - BACTERIAL

Meningitis is an inflammation of the thin tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. It is usually caused by one of several types of viruses or bacteria. Viral meningitis is generally less severe and resolves without specific treatment, while bacterial meningitis can be life-threatening and result in brain damage, hearing loss or learning disability. Today, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Neisseria meningitides* are the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

Symptoms

Symptoms may develop over several hours, or they may take 1-2 days, including:

- High fever
- Headache and stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Discomfort looking into bright lights
- Confusion and sleepiness
- Babies may have fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby or refusal to eat.
- As the disease progresses, persons of any age may have seizures.

Transmission

- The bacteria are spread through fluids from the nose or throat of an infected person (coughing, kissing).
- Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu. Also, the bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.
- People in the same household or child care center or anyone with similar direct contact with the person would be considered at increased risk of acquiring the infection.

Treatment

- Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If symptoms occur, the patient should see a doctor immediately. The diagnosis is usually made by growing bacteria from a sample of spinal fluid. The spinal fluid is obtained by performing a spinal tap, in which a needle is inserted into an area in the lower back where fluid in the spinal canal is readily accessible.
- Bacterial meningitis is treated with a number of effective antibiotics. Identification of the type of bacteria responsible is important for selection of correct medicine.

Prevention

- There are vaccines against several of the bacteria that cause bacterial meningitis, including *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib), some strains of *N. meningitidis*, and many types of *S. pneumoniae*.
- People who are close contacts of a person with meningitis caused by *N. meningitidis* should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease. When a case of *N. meningitides* occurs, public health personnel and health care providers usually contact and treat people at risk. In cases of Hib meningitis, antibiotics can be given to contacts 4 years of age or younger who are not fully vaccinated against Hib.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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