

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

WHAT IS MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

Meningococci are bacteria that cause several kinds of infections. In children, these infections can be very severe. The same bacteria can also infect adults. One of the infections caused by the bacteria is meningitis, an infection of the lining of the brain.

Signs of meningitis include fever, excessive sleepiness, crankiness, stiff neck, and /or vomiting. A rash may also occur. The rash may consist of either red blotches or spots that look like bruises.

Meningitis is a very serious infection in children. A child with meningitis has to be admitted to hospital and given antibiotics through a vein (Intravenously).

Meningococcal infections spread from person to person as a result of continual close contact. The infections sometimes spread within households and childcare centres through nose and throat secretions of an infected person. When one child has an infection, it can be prevented from spreading to other family members and other children in childcare by treating them with an antibiotic. Physicians, in consultation with the local public health agency, can decide who should receive antibiotics to prevent the spread of infection. A vaccine may be used in special circumstances but is of limited use in young children.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- If another child has been diagnosed with meningococcal disease, contact your physician.
- If an antibiotic is prescribed, follow the directions carefully and give it to your child as soon as possible.
- Watch your child closely for signs of infection even if he or she has received an antibiotic. Contact your physician immediately if the child develops any of the following:
 - Fever
 - Excessive sleepiness
 - Excessive crankiness
 - Stiff neck (unwillingness to move the head up and down)
 - Vomiting
 - A rash that looks like blotchy or pinpoint red spots or bruises
- Encourage your child not to share drinks and food.
- Try not to panic about getting the infection. You cannot get this infection through casual contact with a sick child. It is only spread through continual, direct contact with a sick child before he or she has been tested.
- If your child has a meningococcal infection, he or she may return to the childcare facility following treatment. This decision should be made by your physician in consultation and with the local public health agency.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.healthunit.org

Source: Canadian Paediatric Society
Control of Communicable Diseases Manual 18th Edition