

Facts about Meningitis (Bacterial)

Bacterial meningitis is a serious infection of the lining of the brain. It can be caused by many different bacteria. The disease can occur as a single case or as an outbreak in a number of people. Bacterial meningitis can cause permanent health problems or death.

Most people with the disease will feel very ill and have a fever. Young children may just be sleepy, fussy or cry more than usual. Some people may later develop a bad headache, stiff neck or a rash and may have an upset stomach and vomiting.

To find out if someone has bacterial meningitis, a doctor uses a needle to take some fluid from around the spinal cord. The fluid is tested to see if the infection is caused by bacteria or by a virus.

How is Bacterial Meningitis Spread?

Bacterial meningitis is spread by direct contact with fluid from the nose or throat of an infected person. This can happen when people kiss or share food, drinks, baby bottles, soothers, sippy cups, cigarettes, lipstick, water bottles, mouth guards used for sports, mouthpieces of musical instruments or anything else they put in their mouths.

People who are in direct contact with the saliva of a person infected with some types of bacterial meningitis may be at increased risk.

Prevention for People at Risk

If there is a case of bacterial meningitis in a child care centre or school, the Medical Health Officer will tell you who is at risk, who should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick, and who should receive meningitis vaccine. Public health will provide the antibiotics or vaccine.

Bacterial meningitis is a reportable disease in British Columbia. If there is a case of bacterial meningitis in a child or adult in the child care centre or school, immediately report the case to the Licensing Officer or Public Health Nurse assigned to your centre or school.



What to Do at Home

If you think your child has been in contact with someone ill with bacterial meningitis, call your doctor or your local Community Health Centre.



When to Call Your Doctor or 811

Call your doctor if your child has been in contact with someone ill with bacterial meningitis and has any of the following signs:

- a temperature of 38.5 °C or higher
- a headache
- an upset stomach, vomiting
- unusually sleepy
- other signs of illness that concern you

Seek Medical Care

Take your child to the emergency department or call 911 if your child:

- is limp or unable to move
- is listless, hard to wake up or does not respond
- has a stiff neck
- is confused



BACTERIAL MENINGITIS is a vaccine-preventable disease

A vaccine against some types of bacterial Meningitis is offered as part of routine childhood immunizations. Additional vaccines to protect against some very rare types of bacterial meningitis are available to purchase. Other types cannot be prevented by a vaccine.