

MENINGITIS



WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by a number of infectious agents including viruses and bacteria. The type of meningitis and its cause can only be determined by laboratory tests. Viral meningitis (also called aseptic meningitis) is the most common type and is less severe than bacterial meningitis. Fatal cases of viral meningitis are rare and complete recovery is the rule. Bacterial meningitis is often more severe than aseptic meningitis. Three bacteria cause the majority of cases: *Haemophilus influenzae* (Hib), *Neisseria meningitidis*, or *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Meningitis is not highly contagious. Both viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis can be spread through direct contact with nose and throat secretions. Sharing a glass, cup, or eating utensil, coughing or sneezing into the face of another person, or sharing a cigarette are examples of how contact with another person's respiratory secretions might occur. Viral meningitis can be transmitted by fecal contamination (in addition to respiratory secretions) when an infected person sheds or excretes virus in his/her stool.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENINGITIS?

Meningitis can produce mild symptoms – such as headache, low-grade fever, and fatigue lasting 2-3 days in some patients. In others, the symptoms can be severe and begin suddenly with fever, headache, and stiff neck accompanied by other symptoms such as decreased appetite, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light, confusion, seizures, and sleepiness. Also, a purplish red rash may appear with meningococcal meningitis.

HOW IS MENINGITIS DIAGNOSED?

Cerebrospinal fluid can be tested to determine the type of meningitis causing the symptoms. Such identification is important in selecting the correct antibiotics for treating bacterial meningitis.

HOW IS MENINGITIS TREATED?

Treatment for viral meningitis usually consists of reducing fever and plenty of liquids. Bacterial meningitis requires immediate medical attention by a physician and is treated with antibiotics.

WHAT ARE THE INCUBATION AND CONTAGIOUS PERIODS?

Incubation period: viral meningitis: 1 – 10 days, usually less than 4 days. Hib – unknown
Neisseria meningitidis or *S pneumoniae*: 1 to 10 days. Contagious period: Viral meningitis: respiratory shedding

HOW IS MENINGITIS PREVENTED?

Bacterial meningitis – keep up to date with immunizations according to the latest recommendations. Antibiotic prophylaxis may be indicated for close contacts. Vaccinate unimmunized or under immunized children as indicated. Viral meningitis – use good hand-hygiene technique at all times.

EXCLUSION: Yes, as soon as it is suspected. The person may return when cleared by a medical professional.