



## Quick Facts

### About... Meningococcal Disease

#### What is meningococcal disease?

*Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria are normally found in the nose and throat of 10 – 15% of healthy adults. There are 5 strains of *Neisseria meningitidis* responsible for most disease. Rarely, the bacteria can enter areas of the body where bacteria are normally not found and cause a severe, life-threatening infection (“invasive disease”) known as meningococcal disease. Examples of meningococcal disease include meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and septicemia (bloodstream infection). This is a very rare disease; around 30 cases are reported each year in the state of Indiana

#### How is meningococcal disease spread?

The disease is not spread by casual contact or by attending the same work or school setting. *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria are spread from person to person *only through* contact with droplets from an infected person’s nose or throat, including saliva. Some common ways the bacteria can be spread from an infected person are:

- Living in the same household or dormitory room
- Kissing on the lips
- Sharing drinks from the same container (glasses, cups, water bottles)
- Sharing eating with utensils (forks and spoons)
- Sharing a toothbrush, cigarettes, or lipstick

Preventive antibiotic therapy is recommended for individuals who are close contacts of or provide medical care to someone who has meningococcal disease.

#### Who is at risk for meningococcal disease?

Young infants, students attending high school or college, and military recruits are more likely to get the disease. Individuals with a weakened immune system are also at higher risk for the disease, as well as those who live in crowded dwellings or have household exposure to cigarette smoke.

## **What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?**

Symptoms of meningococcal disease include:

- Fever (sudden onset)
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Skin rash that appears as bruising or bleeding under the skin
- Nausea and vomiting
- Eyes that are sensitive to light

In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify but may include:

- Fever
- Fretfulness or irritability
- Poor appetite
- Difficulty in waking the baby

## **How is meningococcal disease diagnosed?**

If you have any of the above symptoms, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. An infected person may become sick within a few hours of developing symptoms, and early diagnosis is important. Your health care provider may collect blood or spinal fluid to see if meningococcal bacteria are present.

## **How can meningococcal disease be treated?**

Meningococcal disease is treated with several different types of antibiotics, and early treatment may reduce the risk of complications or death from the disease. A 24-hour course of antibiotic therapy reduces a person's likelihood of spreading the bacteria. Supportive care in an intensive care unit may be necessary for those with severe infection, and surgery may be needed to remove damaged tissue and stop the spread of infection.

## **How is meningococcal disease prevented?**

Meningococcal disease can be prevented by good hygiene. Cover the nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, throw away used tissues, and wash hands often. Do not share eating or drinking utensils with anyone.

## **Is there a vaccine that can prevent this disease?**

There are two types of vaccine that protect against 4 of the 5 common strains of this disease. One type, MCV4, is available for use in people ages 9 months to 55 years old. The second type, MPSV4, is recommended for adults 56 years and older who are at elevated risk. Ask your healthcare provider which one is right for you. A dose of MCV4 vaccine is recommended for adolescents at age 11 or 12 years old, with a booster dose at age 16. Indiana requires that all 6th-12th grade students receive 1 dose of MC4 meningococcal vaccine. Meningococcal vaccine is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease, such as:

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

Indiana State Law IC 20-30-5-18 requires that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of all students about meningitis and the vaccines available to prevent one type of this serious illness at the beginning of each school year.

One type of meningitis is caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Infections caused by this bacteria are serious, and may lead to death. Symptoms of an infection with *Neisseria meningitidis* may include a high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, confusion and a rash. This disease can become severe very quickly and often leads to deafness, mental retardation, loss of arms or legs, and even death.

The bacteria can mainly be spread from person to person through the exchange of nose and throat secretions. This can occur through coughing, kissing, and sneezing. The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. However, sometimes the bacteria that cause meningitis have spread to other people who have had close or prolonged contact with a patient with *Neisseria meningitidis*. People in the same household or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of getting the infection.

There are two vaccines (Menactra and Menveo) that can prevent most cases of meningitis caused by this bacteria in people over the age of 9 months. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against this disease for all children 11-18 years of age. CDC recommends vaccination of children with the meningococcal vaccine at 11 or 12 years old, with a booster dose at 16 years old. Children ages 9 months-10 years old who have sickle cell anemia or problems with their immune systems should also receive the vaccine.

One dose of meningococcal vaccine is required for students in grades 6 – 12. This is a legal requirement (Indiana Administrative Code 410 IAC 1-1-1). All students entering grades 6-12 need to have a record from the child's doctor indicating the vaccine was given or a record of this immunization in the state immunization registry (CHIRP) prior to the start of the school year.

Many local health departments and private healthcare providers offer this vaccine. Please contact your health care provider for specific instructions regarding your child.

Additional information about meningococcal disease can be found at:

The Indiana State Department of Health

[http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/Meningococcal\\_QFV2\\_2010.pdf](http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/Meningococcal_QFV2_2010.pdf)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/default.htm>

The Indiana Department of Education School Health Student Services

<http://www.doe.in.gov/sservices/healthservices/>

Sincerely,