

BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is bacterial Meningitis?

It is the inflammation of the tissues that cover the brain or spinal cord.. The most common types of bacterial meningitis are:

haemophilus influenzae—most prevalent in the 2 mo.-3 yr. age group; unusual over the age of 5.

meningococcal (caused by Neisseria meningitidis)- the most severe form and primarily affects infants and children under 5; can also occur in older children and young adults.

streptococcal—is a sporadic disease in young infants, the elderly, and other high risk groups. (see the streptococcal fact sheet for additional information)

How it is spread?

Haemophilus influenzae meningitis is transmitted by direct contact of respiratory secretions or by inhaling droplets of respiratory secretions of an infected person. The incubation period is unknown and variable.

Meningococcal meningitis is transmitted from person to person through droplets of respiratory secretions. The incubation period is 1-10 days, most commonly less than four days.

Streptococcal meningitis is transmitted from person to person by inhalation of respiratory droplets from an infected person. The incubation period is unknown, but is probably very short.

How is it treated?

Bacterial meningitis is treated with intravenous antibiotics. Cortisone therapy may also be ordered by the physician to decrease brain swelling.

How can we prevent Bacterial Meningitis?

Prophylaxis: Household, child care and nursery school contacts to haemophilus influenzae and meningococcal meningitis should be given antibiotic prophylaxis. Rifampin is the drug of choice in most situations. If symptoms develop, they should receive prompt evaluation by a doctor. There is no antibiotic prophylaxis recommended for streptococcal meningitis.

The best way to prevent the spread of the bacteria is by covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing, as well as frequent and thorough handwashing.

Vaccination:

- ▶ The incidence of haemophilus influenzae disease has declined dramatically since the introduction of Hib vaccine. Infants begin the Hib vaccine series at 6 weeks of age.
- ▶ Meningococcal vaccine can prevent 2 of the 3 important types of meningococcal meningitis in older children and adults. It is encouraged for freshman college students living in dorms.
- ▶ There is a new vaccine against pneumococcus that is given to infants and toddlers up to 23 months of age and for children up to 59 months of age who are in childcare or who have certain medical conditions.

SYMPTOMS OF BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

The symptoms can vary widely and can be sudden

♦ ***haemophilus influenzae***-fever (can be subtle or severe), vomiting, lethargy, stiff neck or back in older children.

♦ ***meningococcal***-sudden onset with fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, a stiff neck and a rash.

♦ ***streptococcal***-difficulty breathing with periods of no breathing, shock, and pneumonia.



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