
Meningitis (Bacterial)

Description: Meningitis is an infection of the meninges, which are tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord. The two most common types of bacteria that cause meningitis are *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Neisseria meningitidis*, meningococcal meningitis. It is diagnosed by a spinal tap and blood test. Early diagnosis is very important.

Symptoms: May include fever, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting, headache, stiff neck and irritability. Older children may experience irritability, confusion, drowsiness, stupor and coma. Younger children and infants may have non-specific symptoms and include irritability, poor feeding and fever. They may have a high-pitched cry, bulging of the soft spot and convulsions. Often an infected child has recently had a cold or ear infection.

How it is Spread: It is spread by direct contact with droplets and discharges from the nose and throat. It usually requires several hours of contact with an infected person to become infected with the bacteria.

Incubation Period: 1-10 days, usually less than 4 days.

How Long Can a Person Spread the Infection to Others? It can be spread as long as organisms are present in the nose and throat. A person is not contagious after taking effective antibiotics for 24-48 hours. Some people do not become ill from the bacteria, but are able to spread the germs to people who can become sick.

Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:

- Notify the local health department immediately (See ODH Communicable Disease Chart)
- Inform parents immediately if their child has symptoms. Parents should then consult their physician immediately.
- Notify parents of contacts that their child was exposed. Information is available from the local health department that explains meningitis and recommendations for preventive measures.

Control of Spread:

- A child must be under medical care.
- A child with bacterial meningitis is usually hospitalized. He/she may return to child care after antibiotic treatment and a written release from the doctor.
- For meningococcal meningitis, an antibiotic medication is usually recommended as a preventive measure for contacts who were exposed to the infected child.
- Good hand washing procedures should be followed.

Treatment: A child with bacterial meningitis will be hospitalized and treated with antibiotics.

Comments: Meningitis caused by *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib) can be prevented by the Hib vaccination in children under age 5. The vaccine should be given at 2, 4, 6 and 15 months of age. Instruct parents to contact their physician or local health department regarding this immunization. Some cases of meningococcal meningitis can be prevented by vaccine, given in adolescence or early adulthood.