



MENINGITIS: Viral or bacterial?

WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. It is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection.

Viral meningitis is generally less severe than bacterial and resolves without specific treatment. Viral meningitis may be caused by any number of arbor or other viruses. Seasonal appearance is common, mostly occurring in late summer and early fall.

In dealing with **bacterial** meningitis it is important to know which type of bacteria is the cause because antibiotics can prevent some types from spreading and infecting other people. Bacterial meningitis can be quite severe and may result in brain damage, hearing loss, or learning disability. New vaccines have reduced the occurrence of one of the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

IS MENINGITIS CONTAGIOUS? Yes, some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, kissing). Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and are **not** spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

WHAT IS THE INCUBATION PERIOD? The incubation period from exposure to showing symptoms is from 1 to 10 days, usually less than 4 days.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS? Symptoms of both types of meningitis are often occur quickly and include mild to severe headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, fever and chills and body aches. Bacterial meningitis often includes more severe symptoms including rash, severe shock, coma, and can result in death.

ARE THERE VACCINES AGAINST MENINGITIS? Yes, there are vaccines against many different types of meningitis. A new vaccine which protects against several of the most common strains of meningitis is now available and is recommended for all children under the age of 2 years. There is also a vaccine available to protect many older children and adults.

HOW IS MENINGITIS DIAGNOSED AND THE TYPE DETERMINED?

Cultures of blood and cerebrospinal fluid are indicated for patients with suspected invasive meningococcal disease.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR MENINGITIS?

Bacterial Meningitis will generally be treated with antibiotics and supportive therapies. Medication may be needed for family and close contacts. Viral Meningitis will be treated with supportive care. Initially, this patient may be treated as a bacterial case until laboratory work proves otherwise. Health Department personnel are required to follow-up with interviews to determine if prevention treatment is necessary. For additional information regarding meningitis and other health related issues contact us at:

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