



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

Accredited by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc.
www.health.umd.edu

Meningococcal Disease

The Meningococcal bacteria may be present in the body with no effect, or can cause serious illness. Meningococcal disease may manifest as meningitis or as septicemia. Meningitis (sometimes called spinal meningitis) is an inflammation of the meninges -the material covering the brain and spinal cord. It may be caused by any of several bacteria, viruses, or other microscopic organisms. The meningococcal bacteria causes a very serious form of meningitis. Meningococcal septicemia is a bacterial infection in the blood stream. This form of the disease can sometimes occur suddenly and be rapidly fatal. Both forms of the disease may rarely result in complications such as gangrene, loss of limb, brain damage and death.

The risk of meningococcal disease is 3 per 100,000 in college students, with freshman students living in dormitories having a slightly higher risk.

Spread

The bacteria enter the body through the nose and mouth and are spread from person to person by close contact or by sneezing and coughing (air borne). Usually, these bacteria stay in the nose and throat for a few days and then disappear with no ill effects. Some people may continue to have the organism for a longer time in their noses and throats without becoming ill - *they are healthy carriers*.

Why some people get meningitis is not known. The disease occurs more often in the winter and spring than in other seasons. When people live close together there is easy opportunity for the bacteria to spread from one person to another. If one person becomes sick, or if there is a healthy carrier in the group, other people may get the bacteria in their noses and throats and some may become ill, usually within two to ten days after exposure.

Symptoms

Symptoms occur within 2-10 days (usually 3-4 days) after the person has been exposed to the meningococcal bacteria. Meningitis usually begins with flu-like symptoms, which begin suddenly, and progress to high fever, nausea and vomiting, severe headache, and stiffness and pains in the neck, shoulders, and back. Often a skin rash of tiny bright red spots appears.

**IF YOU HAVE THESE SYMPTOMS GET
MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY BECAUSE PROMPT
TREATMENT IS VERY IMPORTANT**

Prevention

Meningitis can be spread by any close contact with a sick person. Close contact means using the same eating utensils or drinking from the same bottle or glass, sharing cigarettes, and kissing.

Vaccination is the best way to protect against some forms of meningococcal meningitis. The vaccine for meningococcal meningitis is an injectable, inactivated-bacteria vaccine. It protects against 4 types of the disease (known as A, C, Y, and W-135) It is about 85-90% effective against these types. The vaccine does not protect against meningococcal disease type B. Most meningococcal disease in the United States and other industrialized countries is caused by type B or type C.

Treatment

If you have had close contact with the person with meningitis, see a practitioner at the Health Center or your personal physician for preventive treatment immediately. Roommates, boyfriends, and girlfriends who have had close physical contact with the sick person should receive preventive treatment. You do not need treatment if you have had only casual contact such as a classmate or working in the same department or building.

Rimactane (generic name for Rifampin) is one of the medications used as preventive treatment. If you are treated, take all the medication as prescribed by your doctor. The recommended dosage of Rifampin, for adults, is 600 mg twice a day for two days. The medication may cause urine, feces, saliva, sweat, and tears to temporarily be colored red-orange (soft contact lenses may be permanently stained as a result). The medication may also cause stomach upset in some people. Before treatment with Rimactane, be sure to tell your doctor if you have a history of liver disease or if you are or might be pregnant. If you are on the birth control pill, use another method of protection for the rest of the current cycle.

The other medication that may be prescribed is Cipro (Ciprofloxacin). The recommended adult dosage for Cipro is one 500 mg dose.

If you or your family have any questions, you may contact the University Health Center at (301) 314-8182 or the Prince George's County Health Department at (301) 883-7837

Reviewed 12.06

Published for the University of Maryland community.

This paper is made from 30% post consumer waste. Don't let the cycle stop here, please recycle this after you recover.