

## Fact Sheet on Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria (germs) called meningococci, also known as *Neisseria meningitidis*. Although meningococcal disease is uncommon, it is a very serious disease. The infection can develop very quickly and can be fatal in about 10 per cent of cases. If infection is diagnosed early enough and the right antibiotics are given quickly, most people make a complete recovery.

Meningococcal bacteria commonly cause:

- **meningitis** – an inflammation of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord
- **septicemia** – infection in the bloodstream.

### Vaccine Available:

Meningococcal vaccines protect against most types of meningococcal disease, but they do not prevent all cases. There are two kinds of vaccines against *Neisseria meningitidis* available in the United States: meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (Menomune®) and meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra® and Menveo®). Please view [vaccine information sheet](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf). (<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf>)

**Meningococcal disease is most common in winter and spring:** Meningococcal disease can occur all year round and in all age groups. However, it is more common during winter and early spring.

### Meningococcal disease is a common bacteria that usually causes no harm

Meningococcal bacteria live naturally in the back of the nose and throat in about 5 – 15% of the population without causing illness. People of any age can ‘carry’ the germs without becoming ill and carriers develop immunity to the strains they carry. Although everyone is a carrier at some time, carriers are most common among young adults. In a small number of people, a particular strain of the bacteria manages to get through the lining of the throat, enter the bloodstream and cause invasive meningococcal disease (meningitis or septicemia).

### Meningococcal bacteria are difficult to spread

The meningococcal bacteria are difficult to spread. They are only passed from person to person by regular, close, prolonged household and intimate contact with secretions from the back of the nose and throat. They cannot be picked up from water supplies, swimming pools, buildings or factories. Meningococcal bacteria are only found in humans, are fragile and, depending upon the strain, and only live from minutes up to a few hours outside the body. You cannot catch meningococcal germs from animals. Chances of being infected by meningococcal bacteria from surfaces are insignificant.

### Meningococcal disease is uncommon but serious

Most cases occur randomly and are unrelated to any others. Outbreaks where more than one person is affected are rare.

**Signs and symptoms in older children and adults may include:**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fever</li><li>• Headache</li><li>• Loss of appetite</li><li>• Neck stiffness</li><li>• Discomfort when looking at bright lights (photophobia)</li><li>• Nausea and/or vomiting</li><li>• Diarrhea</li><li>• Aching or sore muscles</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty walking</li><li>• General malaise</li><li>• Moaning, unintelligible speech</li><li>• Drowsiness</li><li>• Confusion</li><li>• Collapse</li><li>• Rash of red-purple pinprick spots or larger bruises.</li><li>• Painful or swollen joints</li></ul> |
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**Signs and symptoms in infants and young children are similar to above, but may also include:**

- Refusing to eat
- Irritability, fretfulness
- Grunting or moaning

- For more information, please contact the JCPH Communicable Disease Program at 303-232-6301 or visit the JCPH web site at [www.jeffco.us/health](http://www.jeffco.us/health).
- Information is also available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/index.html>

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