

## Know the Facts about Meningitis

Meningitis can be a very serious devastating disease which requires immediate medical attention. There are basically two types of meningitis, one of which is viral and the other bacterial. Viral meningitis usually is not severe and will clear in 2-3 weeks. Bacterial meningitis, according to the Department of Health and Human Resources, affects approximately 1- 3,000 people in the United States. Even though people are treated aggressively with antibiotics, approximately 10-15% will die. Those who do live might be affected by losing their extremities, affecting their nervous system or becoming deaf. Other possible outcomes can include, stroke, brain damage or mental retardation.

The most severe form of Meningitis is *Neisseria Meningitidis*. This form of meningitis is preventable. Individuals are considered high risk for contracting meningitis starting from 11-24 years of age. This would be your middle school children, high school and college students. Vaccinating at 11 years of age is recommended so to prevent the possible contraction of meningitis during their secondary school years.

Meningitis is transmitted by the respiratory tract through sneezing and coughing. It results in a severe infection of the spinal and brain fluid of an individual. Meningitis is diagnosed by doing a spinal tap and throat culture. This is done to grow the pathogen so it can then be diagnosed and treated with the proper antibiotics.

There are many signs and symptoms but the problem is that in the early stages it can resemble the flu and possibly can be overlooked. An individual will have the 'hallmarks' of this disease which are stiff neck and photophobia. (sensitive to light.) Others symptoms are nausea and vomiting along with a high fever, possibly confusion or seizures. With regard to infants, you will find you can't console them; they will cry uncontrollably, have poor feeding habits, have a bulging fontanel (soft spot) on their head and hold their bodies very rigid.

When treating bacterial meningitis it is important to be aggressive with the prescribed treatment. The earlier it is caught the better the outcome will be. This disease is extremely contagious so family members and close contacts

need to be protected. Other individuals according to The Department of Health and Human Resources that need to be protected are:

- College students
- Microbiologists
- Individuals with Immune system disorders
- Individuals with damaged spleen,
- Contacts around someone with meningitis
- Travelers to the middle East
- Military

There are different strains which affect various age groups:

- *Streptococcus pneumoniae* which affects infants and young children. Usually treated with antibiotics.
- *Neisseria Meningitidis* which is bacterial and this can affect dorm students or caregivers of an infected individual.
- *Haemophilus influenzae* which affects infants be can be protected by the Hib vaccine which is given with routine vaccinations.
- *Listeria monocytogenes* can be found just about anywhere, from soil, dust to contaminated foods. This meningitis is referred to as Listeria. Also treated with antibiotics.

After the cultures and spinal taps have the results of which pathogens are present then the appropriate antibiotics can be prescribed and administered by your physician. To protect yourself from the most severe form of meningitis a vaccine called Menactra is available for ages 11 through college age students. This can be attained from the Health Department.

What you can do as a conscientious individual is wash your hands, use good respiratory etiquette and get your child vaccinated with Menactra as a preventative measure. Any questions you have discuss them with your physician. As always, if you have any questions or comments, please eMail me at [gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov)

How to prevent  
Vaccine  
Wash your hands  
Use respiratory etiquette