



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Meningococcal Disease Patient Information

What is Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal Disease is a very severe illness that usually involves swelling of the brain (meningitis). It is caused by the germ (bacterium) *Neisseria meningitidis*, which is also called Meningococcus. In Ontario, infants and students are routinely vaccinated to protect them from meningococcal disease.

What are the symptoms of an infection with Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal meningitis symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. Often there are other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light (photophobia) and confusion.

Meningococcal infection in the blood (septicemia) may include symptoms such as: fatigue, vomiting, cold hands and feet, cold chills, severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest or abdomen (belly), rapid breathing, diarrhea, and in the later stages, a dark purple rash.

How do people get Meningococcal Disease?

People with this disease can spread the germ to others up to a week before they have symptoms of their illness.

Meningococcal Disease is spread between people when:

- there is contact with the secretions from the mouth of an infected person, for example with coughing, sneezing or kissing.
- they share things that go in the mouth such as: cigarettes, lipstick, food or drinks, toothbrushes.

How does Meningococcal Disease make people sick?

About 5-10% of people carry this germ in their nose and throat with no signs or symptoms of disease. They are not sick. Sometimes, the germ invades the body causing serious infection of the blood or a serious infection of the linings that cover the brain and spinal cord or both.

Can Meningococcal Disease be treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If Meningococcal Disease is suspected, samples of blood and/or fluid near the spinal cord (cerebrospinal fluid)

will be collected and sent to the lab for testing. Meningococcal Disease can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics.

Close contacts of a person with Meningococcal Disease are also treated to prevent them from getting the disease. A close contact is someone who is likely to have had direct contact with the spit (saliva) or mucous from either the nose or throat of an infected person.

Public Health investigates each case of Meningococcal Disease to make sure all close contacts are identified. Close contacts should watch for any symptoms of the disease and see a Doctor immediately if any symptoms develop.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of Meningococcal Disease?

Persons arriving in the Emergency Department of the Hospital with symptoms of Meningitis or blood infection will be placed on droplet precautions which means that health care providers and visitors will be required to wear a mask with a visor and gloves. Once the patient has received antibiotics for 24 hours, the droplet precautions will be discontinued because the germ can no longer spread to others.

Are special precautions needed for Meningococcal Disease at home?

Do not share objects that have come in contact with another person's mouth.

1. Ensure good hand washing. Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds after coughing, sneezing, using the toilet, before eating or before preparing food. Caregivers should wash their hands before and after providing care. Gloves should be used to handle body fluids or dirty items. Discard disposable gloves in the regular garbage or clean rubber gloves after using them.
2. Use your sleeve or a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Throw used tissues into the garbage immediately.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

If your symptoms return, return to the Emergency Department immediately.

For specific recommendations about Meningococcal vaccines and their use in preventing infections. *Neisseria meningitidis*, please refer to your Family Physician or contact your local public health unit. If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777 or Ottawa Public Health:

<https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/diseases.aspx>

Reference:

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/health-topics/immunization/vaccine-preventable-diseases/imd>