

Q & A FACT SHEET ON MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Meningococcal disease is one of the most feared infectious diseases in the United States. Although outbreaks are rare and even individual cases are uncommon, they frequently cause great concern when they occur. Reasons include the ability of this particular disease to affect previously healthy persons without warning and cause serious illness and sometimes death. But, actually, meningococcal infections are difficult to catch. The spread of the disease can be limited by diagnosing and treating cases of disease soon after the onset of symptoms and treating all those who have had close contact with an infected person. This Fact Sheet is intended to answer questions commonly asked by the public about meningococcal disease.

WHAT IS MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

Meningococcal disease is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. The two most common types of meningococcal disease are: (1) meningitis, when the bacteria infect the fluid and the covering of a person's spinal cord and brain, and (2) infection of the bloodstream, called meningococcemia.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

Most people who have meningitis have stiff neck, headache, and high fever. These symptoms can develop over the course of several hours, or may take 1 to 2 days to develop. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, discomfort in looking at bright lights, confusion, and sleepiness. Newborns and infants may not have a stiff neck but appear slow or inactive, irritable, or simply stop acting normally. As the disease progresses, patients of any age may have seizures.

AM I OR MY CHILD AT INCREASED RISK FOR MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE?

You are at increased risk if you are a close contact of somebody with meningococcal disease. Close contact means living with or having intimate contact with such an individual. People in the same household and persons attending or working in the same day-care setting as an individual with disease are considered close contacts. Intimate contact means direct exposure to the secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person; examples are kissing, sharing cigarettes, lipstick, lip balm, or drinks such as soda cans or water bottles, or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Being at increased risk means that your risk of developing meningococcal disease is significantly greater than that of other people in your community, and you should receive a recommended antibiotic to prevent the disease. If you have simply been in the same school, or shared transportation, or had social contact but did not have close contact with someone who recently had meningococcal disease, you are not at increased risk compared to others in your community.

You can also get the bacteria from close contact with a well person who is carrying the bacteria. In fact, most people who develop disease have not had contact with cases: cases rarely know a case that occurred earlier. Rather, his or her exposure was from someone who was a healthy carrier and there is no way to know who that person was.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Your doctor or health care provider should be your first source of information about how to protect your health and that of your family. We are making every effort to ensure that they have all the information available to do so.

Your local public health department is available at (530) 527-6824 or 1-800-655-6854