

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

FACTS ON MENINGOCOCCAL INFECTION

What is it?

- An acute bacterial disease caused by the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria, characterized by sudden onset of fever, intense headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck and frequently, a petechial (pinpoint) rash.
- Occurs mainly in children and young adults, more commonly in crowded living conditions
- Up to 10% of the general public may carry this germ at any given time, but only a small minority of persons who are infected with this bacteria will go on to develop invasive disease such as meningitis (inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord) or meningococemia (infection of the blood).
- Although not common, *Neisseria meningitidis* can sometimes cause eye infections and pneumonia.

What are the Symptoms?

- Sudden onset of fever, intense headache, nausea and often vomiting
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Petechial rash (pinpoint)
- In smaller children and infants, there may be continuous crying, lethargy (sluggishness), high fever, difficult to wake and the fontanel (soft spot) may bulge

How is it spread?

Person to person, by direct contact with the nose and throat secretions of infected persons.

Incubation period:

- Varies from 1 to 10 days, commonly 3 to 4 days.

How long is it communicable?

- Until the meningitis bacteria are no longer present in discharges from the nose and mouth - usually following 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

Exclusion period:

Persons with meningococcal infection are excluded from school, daycare or their workplace until allowed to return by a physician.

How is it prevented?

- Avoid sharing drinking and eating utensils, lip sticks, drink bottles, cigarettes and musical instruments with mouthpieces.
- Practice good infection control, such as frequent hand-washing particularly after contact with secretions from the nose or throat and/or after you assist your children with oral care.
- Dispose of soiled facial tissues.

For more information contact the Communicable Disease Control Program at (705) 474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808.

Sources:

Committee on Infectious Diseases, American Academy of Paediatrics (2006). Red Book (27th ed.)
Heymann, David L. 2004. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. 18th Edition.



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