

Bacterial Meningitis

What is **Bacterial Meningitis**?



Meningitis is an infection of the person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. **Bacterial meningitis** can be quite severe and may result in brain damage, hearing loss, or learning disability. For bacterial meningitis, it is also important to know which type of bacteria is causing the meningitis because antibiotics can prevent some types from spreading and infecting other people.

What are the symptoms of **bacterial meningitis**?

High fever, headache, and stiff neck are common symptoms of meningitis in anyone over the age of 2 years. These symptoms can develop over several hours or may take 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, confusion and sleepiness. In babies, the symptoms are more difficult to identify. They may include fever, fretfulness or irritability, difficulty in awakening the baby, or the baby refuses to eat. As the disease progresses, patients of any age may have seizures.

How is **bacterial meningitis** diagnosed?

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If symptoms occur, the patient should see a doctor immediately. The diagnosis is usually made by growing bacteria from a sample of spinal fluid. Identification of the type of bacteria responsible is important for the selection of the correct antibiotics.

How is **bacterial meningitis** treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease. Appropriate antibiotic treatment of most common types of bacterial meningitis should reduce the risk of dying from meningitis to below 15%, although the risk is higher among the elderly.

Is bacterial meningitis contagious? Yes, some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions. Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with bacterial meningitis has been. However, sometimes the bacteria that cause meningitis have spread to other people who have had close or prolonged contact with a patient with meningitis caused by *N.meningitidis*. These individual should receive antibiotics.

Any questions, contact Volusia County Health Department, (386) 274-0651 or (386) 274-0633.