

Frequently Asked Questions

What is meningococcal invasive disease?

Meningococcal (men-IN-jo-cah-call) invasive disease is a severe infection of the blood or the meninges (the covering of the brain and spinal cord). When the infection is in the blood, it is called meningococemia. When the infection is in the meninges, it is called meningococcal meningitis. Both of these infections are caused by a bacterium (germ) called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

What is *Neisseria meningitidis*?

It is a bacterium that may be found in the community. About 5% to 20% of people carry these bacteria in their noses and throats and do not get sick from them. In rare cases the bacteria may get into the blood or the tissue surrounding the spine and brain and cause severe illness.

Who gets meningococcal invasive disease?

It occurs in people of all ages but is more common in the very young (infants and young children) and the elderly (people above age 65). College students and military recruits are also slightly more at risk for the disease because of time spent in crowded living conditions like dorms or barracks.

How do people get meningococcal invasive disease?

The bacteria (germs) are spread from person to person through saliva (spit) or other respiratory secretions. You must be in **close contact** with a sick person's secretions in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact includes activities such as:

- living in the same household
- kissing
- sharing eating utensils or food
- sharing drinks
- sharing cigarettes
- uncovered face-to-face sneezing or coughing

The bacteria are **NOT SPREAD** by casual contact activities like being in the same work or school room as the sick person, or handling books or other items that the sick person has touched. Likewise, being around a person who was in contact with the sick person does not put you at risk for catching meningococcal disease.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal invasive disease?

Because early symptoms may be mild and similar to those of less serious viral illnesses like a common cold, it would not be unusual for people to delay seeking treatment.

The early symptoms of meningococcal disease include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Feeling very tired or sleepy

What are the side effects of vaccination?

Meningococcal vaccines are very safe and effective. As with all vaccines, there can be minor reactions, including pain and redness at the injection site or a mild fever, which typically last for 1 to 2 days. Severe side effects, such as a serious allergic reaction, are very rare.

Where can I get more information on meningococcal invasive disease?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health <http://www.nj.gov/health>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm
- Vaccine Information Statement
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional.

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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