

What causes meningitis?

Meningitis can be divided into two main types; viral and bacterial meningitis. Viral meningitis is reasonably common, but rarely fatal. It presents like flu and cannot be treated with antibiotics. Bacterial forms are comparatively rare, but extremely dangerous. The most common bacterial cause in the UK is the meningococcus. This can cause both meningitis and septicaemia (meningococcal disease).

How is it spread?

The meningococcal bacteria are carried in the back of the throat and are spread by coughing, sneezing and intimate kissing (close prolonged contact). The bacteria are extremely fragile and cannot live outside the body for very long, therefore **it is not a highly contagious disease**. At any one time, around 10% of the population are carrying the bacteria.

Groups at risk

- Babies and toddlers
- Students 15-19 year olds One in four 15 – 19 year olds carry these bacteria in the back of their throats, compared to one in ten of the UK population.
- Over 55 year old especially with concurrent disease affecting immune system or chronic condition

Vaccination

Effective vaccines are available to prevent some types of meningitis. Most of young people would have been vaccinated at school

NB Always check your vaccines are up-to-date with your GP .

A meningococcal group C vaccine is available for all under 25s,

Travel vaccines are also available for people visiting countries where there is a risk of meningococcal groups A, C, W135 and Y. A vaccine is also routinely offered to the over 65s in the UK to protect against pneumococcal disease (including meningitis).

Vaccination does not protect against all types of meningitis, make sure you know the signs and symptoms to look out for

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What can you do?

Familiarise yourself with signs and symptoms be vigilant and seek medical help immediately if concerned.

Common signs and symptoms of meningitis & septicaemia.

FEVER , cold hands and feet

VOMITING , headache

STIFF NECK

PALE, SKIN RASH (see glass test)

DROWSY difficult to wake



The glass test

A rash that does not fade under pressure is a sign of meningococcal septicaemia and is a medical emergency.

If you suspect meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help immediately.

You can:

- Call NHS Direct/NHS 24 or your GP.
- Go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- Dial 999 for an ambulance.
- Describe the symptoms carefully .
- Early diagnosis can be difficult. If you have had advice and are still worried, get medical help again.
- Trust your instincts.

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