

Meningococcal Disease General Information

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meninges). There are many types of meningitis. It can be caused by a virus, bacteria, fungus or other organisms.

Invasive meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*. The bacteria can invade the body causing serious illness, like meningitis. It can also cause an infection in the bloodstream (septicemia/ meningococemia). Some people carry this bacteria in their throat or nose without getting sick. There are different strains of the bacteria, such as A, B, C, W-135, and Y.

Who can get meningococcal disease

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. It is spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose and mouth through activities such as kissing, sharing food, drinks, water bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils, musical instruments with a mouthpiece or cigarettes.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- fever
- headache
- change in the level of alertness
- stiff neck
- skin rash that spreads rapidly and begins as reddish/purplish spots that do not disappear when pressed
- nausea
- vomiting

What is the treatment?

Invasive meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics. Early diagnosis and treatment are important. If symptoms occur, contact your family doctor or visit the nearest emergency department to you immediately.

How can invasive meningococcal disease be prevented?

- Reduce direct contact and exposure to discharges from other people's nose and mouth (e.g. coughing, kissing, sharing utensils, drinking glasses, cigarettes, etc.)
- Follow hand hygiene practice using soap with running water, or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Ensure immunizations are up to date following the [Nova Scotia immunization Schedules](#)
- Reduce overcrowding in living quarters and workplaces (e.g. barracks, dormitories, sleep-away camps, ships, etc.)
- Consult a travel health clinic if traveling to countries where meningococcal disease is endemic.