

# Meningitis Symptoms

Meningitis is a serious and potentially life-threatening disease that involves the inflammation of membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. These membranes are called meninges, and can become inflamed due to a variety of factors.

Bacterial and viral infections are the most common causes of meningitis. Some species of fungi, protozoa, and other parasites can also bring on this deadly disease. The vast majority of meningitis cases result from contagious infections by common viruses and bacteria. As with any type of disease, good hygiene is key to preventing infection. Vaccines are also available to protect against some forms of meningitis.

Some of the more common meningitis symptoms include fever, irritability, lethargy (decreased consciousness), headaches, stiff neck and photophobia (eye sensitivity to light). People with meningitis may also suffer from seizures. Meningitis can also cause or lead to skin rashes, although the rashes caused by bacterial meningitis look different from those caused by viral meningitis.

Newborns and infants suffering from meningitis may lack some or all of the common symptoms. Children with meningitis may be lethargic or irritable. Normally, infants who are ill can be comforted when held. However, a baby with meningitis may show a condition called paradoxical irritability, in which the child becomes more distressed when picked up.

Other symptoms of meningitis in infants can include:

- \* Stiffness of the body and neck rigidity
- \* Mild fever
- \* Lower-than-normal temperature
- \* Jaundice (a yellowish tint to the skin)
- \* Weak suck or poor feeding
- \* Higher-pitched cry

Parents and caregivers may notice that an infant with meningitis will have bulging fontanelles. These are the "soft spots" at the top and front of the baby's skull, where the bones of the skull join. Swelling of the brain causes this bulging. Possible symptoms displayed by a person suffering from meningitis can vary greatly, and depend largely on the age of the child and on the causes of the infection. The initial symptoms of meningitis may appear several days after a child has had a fever, diarrhoea, cold, runny nose, stomach ache, headache, vomiting or any other signs of a bacterial or viral infection.

The symptoms of viral meningitis are usually milder than those of bacterial meningitis, even though both types of meningitis can cause similar symptoms during the early stages of the disease. As a result, prompt and accurate identification of the infectious agent is crucial to the effective meningitis treatment.

Bacterial meningitis is not common, and can be extremely dangerous. About ten percent of cases are fatal. Approximately fifteen percent of bacterial meningitis survivors are left with serious disabilities, such as deafness or brain damage.

The meningococcal bacteria cause Meningococcal meningitis. These bacteria can cause septicaemia (blood poisoning), meningitis, or both. This is a particularly serious form of the disease, as the septicaemia can actually be more life threatening than meningitis and can be caused by a range of other germs. Septicaemia is a medical emergency that requires prompt treatment of strong antibiotics.

Other forms of meningitis are serious, although they can be less dangerous. Any form of meningitis requires professional medical advice and immediate treatment.

If you feel that you or a member of your family may be suffering from viral, bacterial or any other form of meningitis, see a doctor and begin treatment immediately.