



**MENINGITIS  
CENTRE  
AUSTRALIA**

*Raising awareness.  
Every second counts.*

For further information about  
meningitis/meningococcal visit:

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Free Call 1800 250 223  
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Founding member of the Confederation of  
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# Meningococcal and Meningitis

## Frequently Asked Questions



**Free Call 1800 250 223**

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## What should I do if I suspect someone I know has meningitis?

Seek medical care immediately.

## Can you be tested for the disease?

There is no simple test. The diagnosis of meningitis requires the performance of a lumbar puncture (also known as a spinal tap) in which a small amount of fluid is removed through a needle placed in the spinal canal. The cerebrospinal fluid is examined to determine whether an infection is present. This procedure is conducted in hospital.

## How can you catch this?

The bacteria causing meningitis live in the nose and throat of people who are immune to invasive disease, but can carry the germs and spread them to other people by talking, coughing, sneezing, deep kissing, or any other activity which can expose others to respiratory secretions. If a child lacks immunity to the germ then he/she is at high risk of suffering invasion by the germs from the nose and throat into the blood stream and from there to the cerebrospinal fluid.

## Can my child catch it if they're playing with another child suffering meningitis?

Yes.

## Why is no one else in the family sick?

Most adolescents and adults have developed natural immunity to the meningitis germs so that, although they may carry the germs in the nose and throat, their immunity protects them against invasive disease such as meningitis.

## How long does it take to recover from meningitis?

Antibiotic treatment is given for 7-10 days. Full recovery may take several weeks to a few months.

## What are the long term effects?

Meningitis can damage the blood vessels going to and from the brain. As a result of this damage, nerve cells in the brain may suffer permanent damage and die. The most common complication of meningitis is deafness. Other long term effects include: learning problems, behaviour problems, muscle weakness or paralysis, seizures or epilepsy.

## Can you get it more than once?

Meningitis rarely occurs more than once. The only situations in which it may recur are: newborns who suffer meningitis may get it again within a few weeks because of their inability to make a protective immune response; children with certain disorders of the immune system; children and adults with malformations of the inner ear or spinal canal.

## Can you get immunised from meningitis and meningococcal?

All children should be immunised with all of the available meningitis/ meningococcal vaccines.

Meningococcal C – given to children at 12 months of age through the National Immunisation Plan.

Meningococcal B - Bexsero vaccine available by prescription.

Meningococcal ACWY – Menveo, Menactra and Nimenrix brands are available through prescription from your GP. However some states in Australia vaccinate the 15 and 19 year old age group for free. Check with your state immunisation program 1800 671 811.

Pneumococcal – Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV) given at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months through the National Immunisation Plan. Also for those aged 65 years and over (polysaccharide 23vPPV).

Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) - given at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months and 12 months through the National Immunisation Plan.

## How do you minimise the risk of getting either viral meningitis or bacterial meningitis?

**Bacterial Meningitis** – Immunisation. Get your child or yourself immunised with the available meningitis vaccines. However vaccines do not immune you from all strains. If you or your child has contact with someone who gets bacterial meningitis, check with your doctor about prevention.

Do NOT share drink bottles or food. Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing. Wash your hands regularly especially after going to the bathroom or changing a nappy. Avoid deep kissing or sharing a drinking glass, eating utensils, lipstick, or other such items.

**Viral Meningitis** – Do NOT share drink bottles or food. Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing. Wash your hands regularly especially after going to the bathroom or changing a nappy. Avoid deep kissing or sharing a drinking glass, eating utensils, lipstick, or other such items.

Avoid bites from mosquitoes and other insects that carry viruses that can infect humans.

## What appointments, consultations and specialists are likely to be attached with the recovery from meningitis?

All persons who have recovered from meningitis should have their hearing tested. Children should also be seen at regular intervals by the family physician or paediatrician to make sure that they are developing normally. If any problems are detected, then the child should be fully evaluated by a specialist in child development.