

Meningococcal Disease

What do I do if I think I've got it or my child has it?

See your doctor or go to the nearest hospital emergency department immediately. Antibiotic treatment can stop the infection and prevent death if given early.

If you suspect meningococcal disease and have already visited a GP or hospital, return immediately – do not delay.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes. From 2003 onwards the meningococcal Group C (MenC) vaccine is free for children aged one to five years. Also in 2003, children from Years 7 to 12 are eligible for free MenC vaccination at school.

In 2004 children from Years 1 to 7 will be eligible for free MenC vaccination at school.

Please note: the meningococcal Group C vaccine protects only against Group C meningococcal bacteria (about 15% of cases in WA). Meningococcal disease can still occur in persons who have been vaccinated.

For more information about the MenC vaccination program ring the Immunisation Infoline on 1800 671 811 or ask your GP or community nurse.

For more information :

HealthDirect – 1800 022 222

Department of Health

Communicable Disease Control Branch

Phone: (08) 9388 4999

The Meningitis Centre

TW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

100 Roberts Road, Subiaco WA 6008

Phone: (08) 9489 7791

Freecall: 1800 250 223

Fax: (08) 9489 7705

The Amanda Young Foundation

Phone: (08) 9389 7275



What meningococcal disease looks like the day before it kills.



Meningococcal Disease

What is it?

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection caused by certain bacteria that usually live harmlessly in the nose and throat. Rarely, these bacteria invade the blood stream and cause:

- i) an infection of the lining of the brain, commonly known as **meningococcal meningitis** and/or
- ii) an infection of the blood, commonly known as **meningococcal septicaemia**.

Meningococcal disease can cause death within hours.

Early recognition of the symptoms and an urgent visit to a GP or the nearest hospital can prevent death.

How common is it?

Around 70 cases are reported each year in Western Australia. Of these, around 3 to 6 people die and several others will suffer permanent disability, such as deafness or amputation.

It can occur at any age, but the high risk groups are:

- children less than 5 years of age (45% of cases)
- teenagers and young adults between 15 and 24 years of age (25% of cases).

What are the symptoms?

Someone with meningococcal disease will usually become very ill within hours.

The early symptoms are similar to those of many common mild infections, but as meningococcal disease progresses the patient will become increasingly unwell.

Symptoms in infants are usually different to those seen in older children and adults. The following symptoms are typical, but they can appear in any order and not every case will have all the symptoms.

Infants

Fever
Drowsiness
Irritability
Poor feeding
Distress on handling
Vomiting
Pale skin
Neck stiffness
Rash*
High-pitched or moaning cry

The most common symptoms in infants are fever, vomiting, rash, pale skin and lethargy.

Older Children & Adults

Fever
Chills
Vomiting
Muscle and joint pains
Headache
Neck stiffness
Dislike of light
Confusion
Drowsiness
Rash*

*A pin prick or blotchy red rash occurs in two thirds of all cases of meningococcal disease. Sometimes the rash does not develop until the disease is very advanced.