

Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but very serious bacterial illness. It can cause long-term problems, like loss of limbs or brain damage, and be deadly. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal bacteria spread from person to person

People spread the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease to others through respiratory droplets and throat secretions (saliva or spit). Generally, it takes close (kissing) or lengthy (living together) contact to spread them.

Meningitis and bloodstream infection are common outcomes

With **meningococcal meningitis**, the lining of the brain and spinal cord becomes infected and swells. Symptoms include sudden onset of **fever, headache, and stiff neck**. There can be additional symptoms, such as

- Nausea and vomiting
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Confusion



In babies, these symptoms can be difficult to notice or may not be there at all. Instead, a baby may appear slow or inactive, be irritable, vomit, or feed poorly.

With a **meningococcal bloodstream infection**, the bacteria damage the walls of the blood vessels and cause bleeding into the skin and organs. Symptoms include

- Fever and chills
- Feeling tired
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Cold hands and feet
- Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest, or belly
- Rapid breathing
- A dark purple rash

Seek medical care right away if you or your child has symptoms of meningococcal disease.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

Certain people are at increased risk

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, no matter their gender, age, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. However, in the United States, people of some ages have a higher risk than people of other ages:

- Babies
- Teens and young adults (16 to 23 year olds)
- Adults 65 years or older

Having certain medical conditions, going to college, or traveling to certain countries can increase someone's risk for getting this disease.

Meningococcal disease is very serious but treatable

Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics. It's important that treatment be started as soon as possible. Meningococcal disease can be deadly in a matter of hours.

CDC recommends vaccination for preteens, teens, and others

There are two types of vaccines that help protect against meningococcal disease: **MenACWY** and **MenB** vaccines.

Preteens, teens, and young adults

Preteens should get 1 dose of MenACWY vaccine at 11 or 12 years old. Teens should get a MenACWY booster dose at 16 years old. Teens and young adults (16 through 23 year olds) may also be vaccinated with a MenB vaccine, preferably when they are between 16 and 18 years old.

Younger children and other adults

Younger children and other adults usually do not need meningococcal vaccines. However, CDC recommends one or both types of vaccines for people with

- Certain medical conditions that affect the immune system
- Travel plans to areas where the disease is common
- Laboratory jobs working with the bacteria
- Increased risk because of an outbreak in their community

Talk to a doctor about which vaccines you or your child may need.

Vaccine side effects are usually mild

Meningococcal vaccines are safe. Most people who get a meningococcal vaccine do not have any serious problems with it. Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days. Serious reactions are possible, but rare.

[cdc.gov/meningococcal/](https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/)

