

# Meningococcal Disease, Invasive Fact Sheet

## What is it?

Meningococcal disease is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. Symptoms include fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting, and often a rash. It is a serious disease, and can be treated with medication.

Invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) most often results in an inflammation of the meninges (lining of the brain and spinal cord) and/or septicemia (presence of bacteria in blood).

## Who gets it?

These bacteria live in the nose or throat, and perfectly healthy people who have no symptoms can carry it. Up to 5-10% of the population carries these bacteria without knowing it. The bacteria are spread to others by sneezing and coughing. To become infected, a person must be in close contact with the person carrying the bacteria. Young children are most susceptible to infection as they have no immunity to the bacteria. Immunity develops only after an encounter with the germ. Most adults have at some time been exposed, although they probably didn't know it.

## How is it treated?

When a person is diagnosed with this disease, medication is given immediately. **Household and intimate contacts** of affected cases are asked to see their doctor to see if medication is needed to prevent them from getting sick. **Casual contacts such as classmates or co-workers do not usually need medication.**

## What can I do to protect myself?

Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, and dispose of soiled tissues appropriately.

## Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

## References

- Heymann, D. L., (2008). Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- The Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, Infectious Disease Protocol, 2009.

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