



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL **Meningococcal Disease Patient Information**

What is Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal Disease is a very severe illness that usually involves swelling of the brain (meningitis). It is caused by the germ (bacterium) *Neisseria meningitidis*, which is also called Meningococcus.

How do people get Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal Disease is spread between people when there is contact with the secretions from the mouth of an infected person such as when people with the disease cough, sneeze or kiss someone. It can also be spread by sharing things like cigarettes, lipstick, food or drinks, toothbrushes, and other things that go in the mouth. People with this disease can spread the germ to others up to a week before they have symptoms of their illness.

How does Meningococcal Disease make people sick?

About 5-10% of people carry this germ in their nose and throat of with no signs or symptoms of disease. They are not sick. Sometimes, the germ can invade the body causing serious infection of the blood or a serious infection of the linings that cover the brain and spinal cord or both.

What are the symptoms of an infection with Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal meningitis symptoms include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. Often there are other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light (photophobia) and confusion. Meningococcal septicemia (blood infection) symptoms may include fatigue, vomiting, cold hands and feet, cold chills, severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest or abdomen (belly), rapid breathing, diarrhea, and in the later stages, a dark purple rash.

Can Meningococcal Disease be treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If Meningococcal Disease is suspected, samples of blood and/or cerebrospinal fluid (fluid near the spinal cord) are collected and sent to the lab for testing. Meningococcal Disease can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics.

Close contacts of a person with Meningococcal Disease are also treated to prevent them from getting the disease. A close contact is someone who is likely to have had direct contact with the saliva (spit) or mucous from either the nose or throat of an infected person. Public Health investigates each case of Meningococcal Disease to make sure all close contacts are identified. Close contacts should watch for any symptoms of the disease and see a Doctor immediately if any symptoms develop.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of Meningococcal Disease?

Persons arriving in the Emergency Department of the Hospital with symptoms of Meningitis or blood infection will be placed on droplet precautions, and the health care providers and visitors will be required to wear a mask with a visor and gloves. Once the patient receives 24 hours antibiotics, the droplet precautions will be discontinued.

What special precautions are needed for Meningococcal Disease at home?

No special precautions are needed. Once the patient receives 24 hours of antibiotics, the germ can no longer spread to others. However, people should not share objects that have come in contact with another person's mouth and should ensure good hand washing and use their sleeve or a tissue to cover coughs or sneezes. If a tissue is used, it should be thrown into a garbage can immediately.

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds after coughing, sneezing, using the toilet, before eating or before preparing food. Caregivers should wash their hands before and after providing care. Gloves should be used to handle body fluids or dirty items. Discard disposable gloves in the regular garbage or clean rubber gloves after using them.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

If your symptoms return, return to the Emergency Department immediately.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.