

World Meningitis Day 2017 - Factsheet*

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#24HourMeningitis



What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes (meninges) surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Every year over 1 million people worldwide are affected by meningitis. Infection is by far the most common cause of meningitis and is caused by many different germs: viruses, bacteria, parasites and fungi.

Long-term effects in survivors may include: Deafness, Brain damage, Learning difficulties, Seizures, Memory loss, Loss of limbs and/or scarring due to blood poisoning (septicaemia).

- **Viral** meningitis is the most **common** kind of meningitis, and usually the least severe. Full recovery may however take several weeks or months; most cases do not result in permanent damage.
- **Bacterial** meningitis is more serious and can lead to permanent disability or death, even within 24 hours. Bacterial meningitis is mainly due to 3 major bacterial infections: *Neisseria meningitidis* (or meningococcus), *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (or pneumococcus) and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (or Hib). Even with prompt diagnosis and treatment, around 10-20% of patients will die within 24-48 hours and around 10-30% of survivors may sustain life-long disabilities.

Bacterial meningitis can develop rapidly in a matter of hours. For this reason, **prompt diagnosis and treatment is critical**. Trust your instincts and seek urgent medical attention if you are at all concerned. If you are a young person, look out for your friends.



What are the Symptoms?

Don't wait until meningitis threatens the life of someone you care about, learn to look for the following symptoms and if you spot them, **trust your instincts**. The disease can progress very rapidly over several hours from what appears as a typical viral infection to severe illness.

Any age	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever• Cold hands and feet• Pale or blotchy skin• Rapid breathing• Seizures, fits or convulsions• Irritable, drowsy or difficult to wake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listless, less responsive• Blank, staring expression• Vomiting and/or diarrhoea• Rash or spots that don't fade with pressure (also called purpura or petechiae)*
Infants	Older children/adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of appetite, refusing food or drink• Bulging fontanelle (soft spot on head)• Neck retraction• Unusual high-pitched cry• Dislike of being handled	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Severe headache• Dislike of bright lights• Muscle, leg or joint pain• Stiff neck

*Not everyone who contracts meningitis will get a rash. Don't wait for a rash to appear before getting help.

Who's at risk?

Anyone of any age can be affected by meningitis.

- **Infants and young children are at greatest risk.**
About 50% of bacterial meningitis cases occur in **children < 5 years old**
- **A second meningococcal disease peak occurs in adolescents and young adults.**
- **Older people have an increased risk of meningitis** (mainly caused by pneumococcus).
People > 65 years old have an especially high risk of dying from meningitis.
- **People (including children) with a weakened immune system** have a higher risk of infection, as do those who have skipped routine recommended vaccinations.

Can it be prevented?

Even with prompt diagnosis and treatment, there is a high risk of death and disability. For this reason, **prevention through vaccination is the key to tackling meningitis**.

Bacterial: Vaccines are available to protect us from the most common- Hib pneumococcal and most strains of meningococcal diseases.

Viral: MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccines are useful against these infections that can lead to viral meningitis (in case of measles, encephalitis).

Speak to your local healthcare provider to find out which vaccines are available in your area, then make sure you receive all the recommended doses in full and on time.

