

Understanding meningitis

Meningitis is an illness where there is swelling around:

- The brain.
- The spinal cord.

Meningitis can make someone ill very quickly.

It is important to know the **symptoms** so you can get help fast.

A **symptom** is a sign that you have an illness.

Symptoms of meningitis

Symptoms can appear in any order.

Not everyone gets all these symptoms.

- Fever.
- Being sick.
- A bad headache.
- Pain in arms, legs, joints or muscles.
- Cold hands and feet, or shivering.
- Pale or **mottled** skin or a rash anywhere on the body.

Mottled skin means discoloured patches on the skin, often reddish, blue or purple.

- Breathing fast or feeling breathless.
- A stiff neck.
- Not liking bright lights.
- Being very sleepy, **vacant** or difficult to wake.

Vacant means not showing much awareness or interest in the world around you.

- Feeling confused or not thinking clearly.
- Seizures, also known as fits.

Someone with meningitis can get worse very quickly.

Get medical help fast if you notice any worrying symptoms.

Contact tracing for meningitis

Cases of meningitis usually happen as single cases and are not usually linked to each other.

This means you are not usually at risk if you have been in contact with a meningitis patient.

Sometimes **close contacts** of someone with bacterial meningitis are at higher risk of getting the disease or of passing it on to other people.

Close contact means things like:

- Living in the same household.
- Sharing a kitchen in student accommodation.
- Being a partner.
- Kissing.

When this happens, public health doctors will get in touch with close contacts and offer them **antibiotics** or **vaccination**.

This is called contact tracing.

Antibiotics means medicine that fights **bacteria** – these are germs that can cause disease or illness.

Vaccination means getting a medicine that helps stop an illness from happening. Meningitis vaccines come as injections.

If you are worried that you have been in contact with someone with meningitis:

- Talk to your GP.
- Or call 111.

Protecting yourself

There are vaccines to help protect against some types of meningitis.

You can check which vaccines are available to you on the [NHS webpage](#).

There are not vaccines to protect against all types of meningitis so it is important to know the signs and symptoms.

For any questions about meningitis, contact Meningitis Research Foundation Support Services from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm by:

- Email: helpline@meningitis.org
- Live chat on the bottom right of the screen on this webpage:
www.meningitis.org/support-services
- Phone:
 - **080 8800 3344** if you are in Britain or Northern Ireland.
 - **1800 41 33 44** if you are in Ireland.