

# MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE (MENINGOCOCCEMIA)

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### *What is Meningococemia?*

Meningococemia is the infection of the blood with the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. Most people exposed to *Neisseria meningitidis* do not become seriously ill. Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in children and young adults.

### **How is it spread?**

The bacteria are spread by direct, close contact with respiratory and oral secretions (saliva, sputum or nasal mucus) of an infected person. Close contacts include household members and anyone directly exposed to the patient's oral or nasal secretions. Many people carry this bacterium in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

### **Should people who have been in contact with a person with a diagnosed case of meningococemia be treated?**

Only people who have been in close contact need to be considered for preventive treatment. Close contacts include household members, intimate contacts (i.e. kissing), persons performing mouth to mouth resuscitation or endotracheal intubation, or anyone directly exposed to the patient's oral or nasal secretions. Such people are usually advised to take preventive antibiotics. Close contacts should be alerted to watch for early signs of illness, especially fever, and seek treatment promptly.

Casual contact that might occur in a regular classroom, office or factory setting is not significant enough to cause concern.

### **How can we prevent Meningococemia?**

- ▶ The best way to prevent the spread of the bacteria is by covering your mouth when coughing or sneezing, as well as frequent and thorough handwashing.
- ▶ Presently, there is a vaccine that will protect against four of the serogroups of meningococcus. College freshman are encouraged to receive the vaccine.

### **SYMPTOMS OF MENINGOCOCCEMIA**

Often a person with Meningococemia may have:

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Rash
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Weakness

The symptoms may develop rapidly, sometimes in a matter of hours, but usually symptoms appear 2-10 days after exposure.



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