

# Meningococcal FAQs

## Shasta County Health and Human Services Agency Public Health

### ***What is meningococcal disease?***

Meningococcal disease is a very serious, but not highly contagious, disease. The two most common forms are meningococcal meningitis and sepsis. Meningitis is an infection of the covering of a person's spinal cord and brain. Sepsis is an infection of the blood, characterized by fever and shock (severe low blood pressure).

### ***How is meningococcal disease spread?***

The bacterium is not as contagious as influenza nor the common cold. Some people (up to 10-15%) carry the bacteria in the back of their throats without any symptoms. CDC guidance states that close contacts include anyone directly exposed to the patient's oral secretions (e.g., through kissing, endotracheal intubation, endotracheal tube management, or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation). However, *N. meningitidis* is not commonly detected in saliva and CDPH believes that such exposures are more likely to be markers of close contact in which inhalation of respiratory aerosols from the case can occur. The following persons are considered close contacts: Household members and other people who are likely to have been exposed to aerosols or secretions from the case's nose, throat, or mouth (e.g., close face-to-face contact, especially if prolonged)."

### ***What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?***

Common symptoms of meningococcal disease include high fever (above 102° F), headache, and a stiff neck and may include a spotty rash that grows, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, confusion and sleepiness. Symptoms develop and progress rapidly. In newborns and small infants, the symptoms of fever, headache, and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect. The infant may be lethargic, irritable, vomit, or feeding poorly. If the above symptoms occur, the patient should see a doctor immediately. It can lead to hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, amputation, and in 10%-15% of cases, death, even with the best of treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment are critical.

### ***How common is meningococcal disease?***

Meningococcal disease is very serious, but relatively uncommon. It is most common among young children, but can occur at any age. Most cases occur one at a time, or in a small cluster.

### ***What should I do if I have been exposed to a person with meningococcal disease?***

People with close or prolonged contact with a meningococcal patient should see a physician (see above). Close contacts include people who live in the same household or who come in direct contact with fluids from the patient's mouth or throat (such as through kissing, sharing eating utensils, drinks, cigarettes, mouth-to-mouth

resuscitation, etc.) within 7 days of onset of patient's illness. These people may need preventive antibiotics. People with limited indirect contact (such as coworkers or fellow students at school) do not need preventive therapy. Antibiotics can have side effects, interact with other medicines, and when people take antibiotics unnecessarily, they can build up a resistance to that medication so it may not be as effective when the person actually really needs them.

***What can I do to lower my risk of meningococcal disease?***

Never share drinks between people from the same container; never use the same eating utensils; never share any cosmetic products around the lips, and wash hands frequently and thoroughly. Maintaining a healthy diet and getting plenty of sleep can bolster one's immune system. Talk to your doctor about vaccination.

***What happens when a case of meningococcal disease is reported?***

State law requires any meningococcal infection be reported to Shasta County Public Health. Several steps are then taken. First, Public Health will conduct an extensive inquiry into determining if any additional cases exist, identifying and recommending treatment of any persons directly exposed, and educating any persons who might have been exposed about what symptoms to look for. Public Health will also distribute timely and accurate information. Public Health will coordinate with other healthcare providers to ensure a swift and appropriate response to any further infections.

***Who can I contact for more information?***

Contact Shasta County Public Health at (530) 225-5591.

[www.shastahhsa.net](http://www.shastahhsa.net) – Click on “Current Health Concerns,” then “Meningococcal information.”