

Meningococcemia is a rare infectious disease characterized by upper respiratory tract infection, fever, skin rash and lesions, eye and ear problems, and possibly a sudden state of extreme physical depression (shock) which may be life-threatening without appropriate medical care. There are two forms of meningococcemia. Fluminant meningococcemia develops very rapidly and is more severe than chronic meningococcemia, which has a waxing and waning course. Meningococcemia affects males and females in equal numbers. However, most cases develop in persons twenty years of age or younger and half of these cases are in children under five years of age. In the United States 1.2 cases per 100,000 occur annually. Winter and spring are the most common seasons of the year when cases are reported. Epidemics can occur under crowded conditions and tend to occur at 20 to 30 year intervals. In other parts of the world epidemics are usually caused by the Group A strain of the bacteria. During epidemics, rates of 5 to 24 cases per 100,000 persons have occurred. In Sao Paulo, Brazil, during 1974 the epidemic rate was 370 per 100,000 persons infected with Meningococcemia. In the United States, the most prevalent Group strains of the bacteria are B,C,Y, and W-135. The diagnosis of Meningococcemia may be confirmed by a thorough clinical evaluation and specialized blood tests.