

# Bacterial Meningitis FACTSHEET

## *Streptococcus pneumoniae*

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#### **What is bacterial meningitis caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae*?**

Bacterial meningitis is an inflammation of the meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) that can be caused by several types of bacteria, including *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is a bacterium commonly found in the nose and throat. Many people carry the bacterium without becoming sick.

#### **Who gets *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infections?**

*Streptococcus pneumoniae* can sometimes cause severe illness in children, the elderly and immunocompromised individuals. The bacterium is the most common cause of ear infections (otitis media), sepsis (blood infection) in children as well as pneumonia in immunocompromised individuals and the elderly. *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is considered "invasive" when it is found in the blood, spinal fluid or other normally sterile sites.

#### **What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?**

The symptoms of bacterial meningitis are high fever, headache, and stiff neck in anyone over the age of 2 years. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking at bright lights, confusion or sleepiness. Some individuals develop a rash. The classic symptoms of fever, headache, and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect in newborns and small infants. The infant may only appear slow or inactive, or be irritable, have vomiting, or be feeding poorly. As the disease progresses, anyone may develop seizures.

#### **How is bacterial meningitis spread?**

Bacterial meningitis caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is spread by the respiratory fluids from the infected person when they cough or sneeze. It can also be spread by direct contact with the secretions from the nose and throat of the infected person.

#### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms can appear within hours to 1 to 2 days after being exposed.

#### **Is a person with bacterial meningitis contagious?**

Yes, some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious, such as *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Neisseria meningitidis* and *Haemophilus influenzae*. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory secretions such as coughing, kissing, sharing a cigarette, drink or a toothbrush and by being in close contact for a period of time. Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

#### **How is bacterial meningitis treated?**

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. Due to the seriousness of the infection, the patient is usually hospitalized and the treatment needs to be started as early as possible. The antibiotic is generally given through intravenous fluid.

#### **Should a person with bacterial meningitis be isolated?**

Yes, a person with bacterial meningitis is placed in isolation. The person needs to be isolated for at least 24 hours after appropriate antibiotics have been given. Anyone visiting the person needs to wear a mask to enter the room for as long as the person is isolated.

#### **Is there a vaccine for *Streptococcus pneumoniae*?**

Yes, there is a pneumococcal vaccine that can help to prevent invasive *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infections. The vaccine is currently recommended for people that are immunocompromised, or over the age of 65. Recently the vaccine was also approved for use in children under two years of age.

#### **Want more information?**

Information about bacterial meningitis and other related health topics can be found at the website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-8141.

