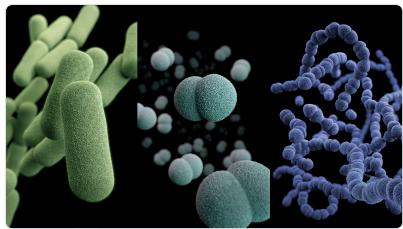


About Bacterial Meningitis

JAN. 9, 2024

KEY POINTS

- Bacterial meningitis is serious and death can occur in a few hours.
- However, most people recover from bacterial meningitis.
- Those who recover can have permanent disabilities.



What it is

Several bacteria can cause meningitis. Leading U.S. causes include:

- [Streptococcus pneumoniae](#)
- [Group B Streptococcus](#)
- [Escherichia coli](#)
- [Haemophilus influenzae](#)
- [Neisseria meningitidis](#)
- [Listeria monocytogenes](#)

Mycobacterium tuberculosis, which causes [tuberculosis or TB](#), is a less common cause.

Symptoms

People with bacterial meningitis usually have [typical meningitis symptoms](#).

When to seek emergency care

Anyone with symptoms of meningitis should see a healthcare provider right away. A healthcare provider can determine if you have meningitis, what's causing it, and the best treatment.



Complications

Complications can include seizures, coma, and death. Many of these bacteria are associated with another serious illness, sepsis.

KEEP READING
[Sepsis](#)

Risk factors

Certain factors increase a person's risk for getting bacterial meningitis.

Age

Some causes are more likely to affect certain age groups:

Newborns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group B <i>Streptococcus</i>• <i>E. coli</i>• <i>S. pneumoniae</i>
Babies and young children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>S. pneumoniae</i>• <i>H. influenzae</i>• Group B <i>Streptococcus</i>• <i>N. meningitidis</i>
Teens and young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>S. pneumoniae</i>• <i>N. meningitidis</i>
Older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>S. pneumoniae</i>• Group B <i>Streptococcus</i>• <i>H. influenzae</i>• <i>L. monocytogenes</i>• <i>N. meningitidis</i>

Certain medical conditions

Certain medical conditions, medications, and surgical procedures put people at increased risk, including:

- Having a weakened immune system
- Having a cerebrospinal fluid leak
- Not having a spleen

Group setting

Infectious diseases tend to spread where large groups of people gather. For example, college campuses have reported outbreaks of meningococcal disease, caused by *N. meningitidis*.

Travel

Travelers may be at increased risk for meningococcal disease

- During the annual Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage
- In sub-Saharan Africa during the dry season

Travelers should also avoid being with known TB patients in crowded, enclosed environments.

Pregnancy

Being pregnant increases someone's risk of getting a *Listeria* infection (*L. monocytogenes*). Some foods are more likely to contain *Listeria* than others.

[Preventing *Listeria*](#)



How it spreads

L. monocytogenes can spread through food, while the bacteria shown below spread from one person to another.

Group B <i>Streptococcus</i> <i>E. coli</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can pass to babies during birth
<i>H. influenzae</i> <i>S. pneumoniae</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spread by coughing or sneezing• Require close contact

<i>N. meningitidis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread by sharing respiratory or throat secretions (saliva or spit) • Require close or lengthy contact
<i>M. tuberculosis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread by coughing or sneezing • Don't require close contact
<i>E. coli</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread through contaminated food when people don't wash their hands well after using the toilet

Prevention

Vaccination

Vaccines are the most effective way to protect against certain types of bacterial meningitis.

There are vaccines for 4 types of bacteria that can cause meningitis. All but the last are widely used in the United States.

- [Meningococcal vaccines](#) (*N. meningitidis*)
- [Pneumococcal vaccines](#) (*S. pneumoniae*)
- [Hib vaccines](#) (*Haemophilus influenzae* serotype b)
- Bacille Calmette-Guérin vaccine (*M. tuberculosis*)

SEE ALSO

[Vaccines and Immunization](#)

Pregnancy screening

Pregnant women should talk to their healthcare provider about getting screened for group B *Streptococcus*. Healthcare providers give antibiotics (during labor) to women who test positive. This helps prevent passing the bacteria to their babies.

KEEP READING

[Screening for Group B Strep](#)

Preventive antibiotics

Sometimes antibiotics can help prevent people from getting sick if they were around someone with bacterial meningitis. Healthcare providers and health departments decide who should get these preventive antibiotics.

Testing and diagnosis

There are [laboratory tests for meningitis](#).

Treatment and recovery

Healthcare providers treat bacterial meningitis with antibiotics. It's important to start treatment as soon as possible.

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\)](#)