



Meningitis

What is meningitis?

Meningitis, commonly referred to as spinal meningitis, is a condition that causes inflammation of the tissues covering the brain and the spinal cord. It may be caused by several different germs. The illness can cause serious health problems like blindness, deafness, paralysis, permanent brain damage or even death. With treatment most people recover fully.

What are the symptoms?

Adults

Fever, severe headache, neck stiffness, nausea that can lead to vomiting, drowsiness or confusion and eye pain from bright lights.

Children:

Fever that is not easily lowered with Tylenol, nervousness or irritability. An infant may be difficult to awaken or refuse to eat. An infant with a fever of 101° or more and who cannot be easily awakened should be seen by a doctor.

How is it spread?

Aseptic (viral) Meningitis, most commonly caused by an enterovirus, is spread through direct contact with an infected person's respiratory secretions (e.g., saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus). Shaking hands with an infected person or touching something that they handled followed by rubbing your own nose, mouth or eyes can spread the virus. Other examples include, coughing, sneezing, kissing and sharing of unwashed eating utensils. In children, the virus usually spreads through the stools of children who are not toilet-trained.

Bacterial meningitis, such as neisseria meningitidis, Hib (Haemophilus influenza B), and streptococcus pneumonia (pneumococcal) is generally spread to people who live in the same household, attend the same day care center or have direct contact with an infected person's oral secretions like saliva.

How is it treated?

Viral meningitis has no specific treatment at this time. Most patients recover completely on their own. Doctors recommend bed rest, plenty of fluids and medicine to relieve fever and headache.

Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics. There are some vaccines available for some forms of bacterial meningitis.

What precautions should I take when traveling?

Risk to travelers is generally low and cases are rare. Learn about any incidences of the illness in the specific area where you plan to travel. Your risk increases with long-term contact with local populations where the illness is present. For specific information on certain geographical areas that you are traveling, contact your local public health department.

Where can I get more information?

People with general public health questions should call 817-321-4700. You can visit us online (<http://health.tarrantcounty.com>), or call our Epidemiology and Health Information Division at the office at 817-321-5350. You may also contact the CDC at 1-888-246-2675 or online at (www.bt.cdc.gov).