



Invasive Meningococcal Disease

What is invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)?

Invasive meningococcal disease is a rare but serious illness caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. It can cause an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or an infection of the blood stream. The bacteria can be found in the nose and throat of healthy people but not cause infection.

How is IMD spread?

The disease can be spread from person to person through direct contact with the oral or nasal secretions of the infected person. Activities such as open mouth kissing, sharing of eating utensils, water bottles, lipstick, cigarettes or vapes can spread the infection.

It is not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with IMD has been.

A person with IMD can be infectious from 7 days before they become ill and up to 24 hours following the start of antibiotic treatment.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Symptoms may include a sudden high fever, headache, stiff neck, vomiting, sensitivity to lights, severe aches or pain, confusion, and/or drowsiness. Sometimes a purplish skin rash will appear. It is important to see your health care provider immediately if you have these symptoms. In young children, you may notice irritability, excessive crying, poor feeding, grunting, moaning or convulsions.

The symptoms may appear between two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within three to four days. The symptoms worsen rapidly, sometimes within hours.

How do I know if I have IMD?

It is important to be aware of the symptoms of IMD. If you develop symptoms, there are different tests the health care provider will use to test for the bacteria. Sometimes your blood or cerebral spinal fluid (CSF) will be tested.

What is the treatment for IMD?

Early diagnosis and treatment are extremely important. Most people with IMD are treated with antibiotics, but quick medical attention is essential.

How do I protect myself and others?

Avoid sharing anything that has been in contact with someone else's mouth. Cover your mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing, throw away any used tissues and wash your hands.

Keeping up to date with recommended immunizations is the best defence against IMD. Contact your health care provider to ensure that you are protected. If you do not have a health care provider, call the Immunization Team at the health unit for more information, 705-721-7520 ext. 8806.

See the following fact sheets on meningococcal immunization for more information.

[Meningococcal Conjugate ACYW](#)

[Meningococcal B \(4CMen-B\)](#)

[Meningococcal C Conjugate \(Men-C\)](#)

Is there anything special I need to know about IMD?

It is important to understand the disease is not easily spread. Fortunately, very few people are at risk for this disease even when exposed.

If you have had close, personal contact with someone who has IMD, you will be contacted by Public Health. Close contacts are persons living in the same household, attending the same childcare center, or someone who may have shared saliva with the person who is infected.

Close contacts will be alerted to watch for signs of infection and to seek prompt medical attention. They may be advised to take an antibiotic and/or a vaccine to prevent illness as well.

Casual contacts (classmates or coworkers) are not considered at increased risk however it is still important to monitor for any symptoms and to seek medical care should they develop symptoms that could be invasive meningococcal disease.

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809.



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