



Meningococcal meningitis

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Key facts

Transmission: Airborne and direct contact

- When infected people cough, sneeze, blow their nose or spit, they spread small particles through the air, which are then breathed in by other people
- Direct contact (for example, through kissing, sharing cups or eating utensils) with infected saliva or nose mucus

Most vulnerable to severe disease

- Unvaccinated infants, teenagers and young adults
- People gathered in large groups (for example, at community or religious festivals)
- People living with other illnesses such as sickle cell anaemia or HIV/AIDS

Vulnerable to contracting the disease

- Unvaccinated people
- People living in cramped and crowded conditions (for example displaced populations)

Symptoms

- High fever (usually)
- Headache (usually)
- Stiff neck (usually)
- Nausea and vomiting (sometimes)
- Sensitivity to light (sometimes)

- Confusion (sometimes)

Symptoms in newborns and infants

(** small babies may not show the same symptoms as older children and adults**)

- Bulging fontanelle (soft spot) on the head
- Inactivity
- Sleepiness/difficulty waking
- Crying and irritability
- Vomiting
- Refusing to eat
- Rapid breathing
- Blotchy skin, turning pale and then blue
- Stiff, jerky movements
- Rash

What can you do to prevent and control an epidemic?

Monitoring the community and identifying sick people

- Identify and ensure sick people isolate before they spread the disease to others

Treatment and management

- Refer those with suspected meningitis to health facilities
- Support contact tracing and follow-up of close contacts for chemoprophylaxis (antibiotics)
- Provide psychosocial support to the sick person and their family members

Safe shelters and spaces

- Reduce overcrowding and improve ventilation in living shelters, workplaces and schools, if possible

Hand and respiratory hygiene

- Promote good hand hygiene (handwashing with soap)
 - BEFORE: preparing food; eating; feeding a child; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
 - AFTER: using the toilet or cleaning a baby; touching garbage or waste; touching or feeding animals; blowing nose, coughing or sneezing; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
- Promote respiratory hygiene and coughing etiquette (cover cough or sneeze using a sleeve or tissue, wash hands after coughing or sneezing, do not spit onto the ground or in public)

Social mobilization and health promotion

- Find out the specific advice being given by health and other relevant authorities
 - Promote recommended health practices (such as routine vaccination, social distancing, separation of healthy people and sick people, etc.)
- Model following this advice and inform community members of current health practice advice
- Offer support and encouragement to follow the advice
 - Try to gain understanding about if and why health practice advice is not being followed
 - With the guidance of your supervisor and health authorities, work with communities to overcome barriers to following health advice and recommended practices

Immunization

- Promote routine vaccination programmes for children
- Support mass vaccination campaigns

Mapping and community assessment

- Make a map of the community.
- Mark the following information on the map:
 - How many people have fallen sick with meningitis? Where?
 - How many people have died? Where? When?
 - Who and where are the vulnerable people?
 - Where are the health facilities? (include traditional healers)
- Record the following information on the back of the map:
 - When did people start to fall sick with meningitis?
 - How many people live in the affected community?
 - How many are children under five years?
 - How many teenagers and young adults?

- Is HIV/AIDS prevalent among the population?
- Are most people in the community vaccinated against meningitis?
 - Is there a vaccination campaign planned?
- How many close contacts do people with meningitis have?
 - Have there been large gatherings recently?
 - Are people with meningitis living in cramped or overcrowded conditions?
 - Are contacts showing symptoms of meningitis?
- How common is it for people to live together in crowded spaces? Is there ventilation and fresh air in homes, schools and workplaces?
- Are children badly affected by meningitis? Are there other groups (specific ages, occupations, geographic areas, etc.) that are badly affected?
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about vaccinations? Are there societal, cultural or religious beliefs that prevent people from getting vaccinated?
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for and feeding sick people? Consider any differences in roles and responsibilities between men and women.
 - When babies and infants are sick, do women continue to breastfeed them?
- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources do people use/trust the most for information?
 - Are there rumours or misinformation about measles or vaccines? What are the rumours?