



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Bacterial vs. Viral Meningitis

	Bacterial Meningitis	Viral Meningitis
What is <i>Meningitis</i>?	<p>Meningitis is an inflammation of the tissue around the spinal cord and brain. When this occurs, less blood and oxygen reach the brain cells and this produces the symptoms. It is sometimes called Spinal Meningitis. It can be caused by either a virus or a bacteria. Meningitis caused by a virus is less severe than the one caused by bacteria.</p> <p>There are three (3) types of bacteria (germs) that cause the disease: H. Influenzae (Hib), Strep pneumoniae, and Neisseria meningitidis.</p> <p>The Strep pneumoniae germ is the same one that causes most cases of ear infections and pneumonia. This is a very common bacteria and can be found in up to 70% of all adults, most of whom experience no symptoms.</p>	<p>Meningitis is an infection of the tissue around the spinal cord and brain. This results in swelling of the brain tissue. When this occurs, less blood and oxygen reach the brain cells and this produces the symptoms. It is sometimes called Spinal Meningitis. It can be caused by either a virus or a bacteria. Meningitis caused by a virus is less severe than the one caused by bacteria.</p> <p>Viral meningitis is relatively common and can be caused by different viruses. The most common cause is from a group of viruses known as enteroviruses. These non-polio enteroviruses are second only to the "common cold" viruses, the rhinoviruses, as the most common viral infectious agents in humans. The enteroviruses infect an estimated 10-15 million or more people a year in the United States. However, fewer than 1 in 1,000 of the people infected with these viruses ever develop viral meningitis.</p>
What are the symptoms?	<p>The most common symptoms include a high fever, severe headache, stiff neck and sometimes a rash. Other symptoms might be nausea, vomiting, confusion and being sleepy. People with these symptoms should see their doctor.</p>	<p>The most common symptoms include a high fever, severe headache, stiff neck and sometimes a rash. Other symptoms might be nausea, vomiting, and confusion</p>
How is <i>Meningitis</i> treated?	<p>Bacterial meningitis can be treated with antibiotics. It is very important that the disease be diagnosed early and treated as soon as possible. This disease can cause death in about 15% of all people who are infected, so anyone who has any of these symptoms should see a doctor as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Most people recover completely on their own. The best treatment is supportive treatment, which includes rest, drinking plenty of fluids and over-the-counter medications to reduce the fever and headache.</p>

<p><i>How do people catch this disease?</i></p>	<p>The Strep pneumoniae germ is very common. It is usually spread through close, personal or prolonged contact with respiratory or oral secretions. Unlike a cold or the flu, the bacteria that cause meningitis cannot be spread by casual contact or by breathing the air where a infected person has been.</p>	<p>The viruses that cause viral meningitis are very common. They can be spread through close, personal or prolonged contact with respiratory or oral secretions. Some of the viruses can also be spread through the oral-fecal route.</p>
<p><i>What can be done to prevent this disease?</i></p>	<p>There is a very effective vaccine for the Hib bacteria that all children are required to have before attending school.</p> <p>There are two (2) vaccines that can be used to prevent Strep pneumonia, one for children from 2 months to 2 years of age and another for those over age 65 and some other high risk people.</p> <p>There is a vaccine available for N. Meningitis that is an optional vaccine sometimes recommended for college students living in close dormitory rooms. Close contacts of someone who is infected with N. Meningitis are often treated with antibiotics to prevent the disease.</p>	<p>The best prevention is frequent, thorough hand washing.</p>
<p><i>Is the public at risk?</i></p>	<p>There is no increased risk to the general public. Even close personal contacts (household, personal care workers) are at only minimal increased risk.</p>	<p>There is no increased risk to the general public. Even close personal contacts (household, personal care workers) are at only minimal increased risk. Most people infected with these viruses do not become sick.</p>

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Region 7

Serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties

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