



# Bacterial Meningitis

## What is bacterial meningitis?

Meningitis is a rare but serious infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. Meningitis is usually caused by bacteria or viruses. Bacterial infection of the meninges is referred to as bacterial meningitis. The most common causes of bacterial meningitis in adults are *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Neisseria meningitidis* or *Haemophilus influenzae*.

## What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?

Symptoms that may develop suddenly include:

- high fever
- severe headache
- vomiting
- seizures
- stiff neck

Other symptoms may include confusion, sleepiness and a rash especially on the hands and feet. Infants may be irritable, refuse meals, unusual sleep patterns and may constantly cry. Newborns and infants may also have the soft spots on their heads bulge and a lower than normal body temperature. Immediate medical attention is necessary if any of these symptoms are present. Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. Tests may be required so that the doctor can examine the fluid for bacteria around the brain and spinal cord. A blood test may also be done to test for bacteria in the blood.

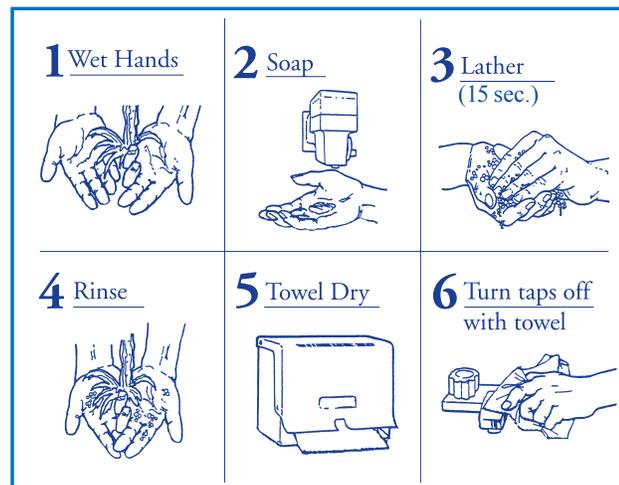
## How does bacterial meningitis spread?

The bacteria that causes meningitis is spread through direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat, such as kissing, sharing drinks, cigarettes, sleeping arrangements or children sharing toys. The bacteria is not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where an infected person has been.

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

## How can bacterial meningitis be prevented?

- The most effective method of prevention is to wash your hands thoroughly and often for at least 15 seconds using the 6-step method.
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze.
- Do **not** share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys, or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- Keeping up to date with vaccinations and talking to your doctor about your need for other vaccines.
- Overseas travellers should check with the Health Department or travel clinic prior to their trip to see what vaccines are recommended.
- See your doctor if you have had close contact with an infected person as they may prescribe an antibiotic.



## How is bacterial meningitis treated?

Bacterial meningitis is treated with antibiotics. If infected, a person is considered non-contagious after 24 to 48 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

The Public Health Department notifies close contacts to recommend specific antibiotics be taken to prevent an infection. The person must visit a doctor to get a prescription for an antibiotic.

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