

MENINGOCOCCUS

What is *Meningococcus*?

Meningococcus is a germ (bacteria) that is usually found in the throat. About 10% of people have meningococcus in their throats, but have no symptoms of sore throat. Children can pick up this germ by close contact with someone who has the germ in their throat. Young children may not be able to fight off this germ and it can spread from their throat to their blood stream and make them very sick. The germ enters the body and causes infection in the blood. In some children, this infection is very severe and can cause shock and bleeding. The infection can spread from the blood to the brain and cause meningitis (inflammation of the brain or spinal cord).

How is Meningococcal infection diagnosed?

Meningococcal infection is diagnosed by cultures of the blood and spinal fluid. Children with this infection may only have high fever, or they may have a high fever and a purple rash caused by bleeding into the skin. If a child has signs of meningitis (high fever with stiff neck, headache, seizures), then your doctor would recommend a spinal tap to look for meningitis. The spinal fluid would be sent to the laboratory for culture.

How can it be treated?

This germ is a bacteria that is killed by a number of different antibiotics. However, the germ can make a child very ill very quickly, and often children with this infection are so sick that they need to be in the Intensive Care Unit.

How can you keep from spreading this organism?

Meningococcal germs can be spread from one person to another. If a child is admitted with meningococcal infection, the child needs to be in isolation for the first 24 hours of antibiotic therapy. All health care providers need to wear a mask, gown and gloves. Family members and close contacts need to take an antibiotic that will kill the germ in case they might be carrying it in their throats. If a family member develops a fever, a doctor should see them right away. The doctor should be told that this person was in contact with a child who had meningococcal infection.