

# MENINGITIS, BACTERIAL

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

# 5.10

### DESCRIPTION

Bacterial infection or inflammation of the thin membranes (meninges) and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. It is a life-threatening disorder and prompt treatment is vital.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Fever, chills, and sweating
- Headache
- Irritability
- Eyes sensitive to light; pupils may be of different sizes
- Stiff neck
- Vomiting
- Red or purple skin rash (associated with one kind of bacteria).
- Confusion, lethargy, drowsiness, or unconsciousness
- Sore throat or other signs of respiratory (nose, throat, and lungs) illness may occur before other symptoms
- Seizures

### CAUSES

An infection usually caused by one of three types of bacteria. *Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)*, *Neisseria meningitidis*, or *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Bacterial germs are spread by close contact with an infected person. The infection may start in another body part, such as lung, ear, nose, throat, or sinus that spreads to the meninges.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Frequenting smoke-filled bars
- Congested living environment such as residence halls
- Poor sleep habits, poor nutrition, which weakens the immune system
- Ear, sinus, respiratory or tooth infection and other illnesses that lower resistance
- Use of drugs that decrease the body's immune responses, such as anticancer drugs or steroids
- Contact with a person with meningitis

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Get all the recommended vaccines for infants and adults. Other vaccines may be recommended depending on an individual's health condition.
- Vaccine against *Neisseria meningitidis* (meningococcal vaccine) is recommended for students going to college and for travelers to

certain areas of the world.

- Avoid contact with anyone who has meningitis (depending on bacterial type). If contact occurs, preventive treatment may be recommended.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

Hospitalization is always required. This is a serious illness, but full recovery is likely if treated promptly and no complications arise.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Death or permanent brain damage including paralysis, loss of limbs, hearing loss, speech difficulty and mental impairment.

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about the symptoms. Medical tests may include blood studies, culture of cerebrospinal fluid, x-rays, CT, and others to confirm the diagnosis.
- Hospital care is usually needed, sometimes in an intensive care unit.
- Treatment involves antibiotics, supportive care for symptoms, and steps to prevent complications.
- Restrict visitors until determination is made that the disease is no longer contagious.

### MEDICATION

- Intravenous antibiotics
- Steroids may be prescribed
- Anticonvulsants may be used to treat or prevent seizures
- Close contacts will need antibiotics

### ACTIVITY & DIET

After a two-three week recovery period, gradually resume normal activity as your strength allows.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- You or a family member has symptoms of bacterial meningitis.
- You have had contact with someone who has meningitis.
- Sudden onset of high fever (101.5o) along with a severe headache and any other signs or symptoms requires immediate medical attention.

## Student Health Center



## WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

## 618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.