

# Do you know enough about meningococcal disease?

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## What is meningococcal disease?

It's a bacterial infection (not a virus) that can lead to<sup>1</sup>

- **Septicaemia** – infection of the blood and/or
- **Meningitis** – infection of the membranes that line the spinal cord and brain

The bacteria can also infect other parts of the body, such as the joints.<sup>1</sup>

## Are there different types of meningococcal disease?

There are multiple types (strains) of meningococcal bacteria.<sup>2</sup> Globally, there are 6 serogroups which most commonly cause disease (A, B, C, W, X and Y).<sup>2</sup>

**In Australia, 3 strains cause the majority of disease (B, W and Y).<sup>3</sup>**

## How does it spread?

The bacteria that causes meningococcal disease can spread from one person to another by close or lengthy contact. Whilst not easily spread, behaviours such as coughing and sneezing, living in close quarters, or kissing increases the risk of spread.<sup>1,4</sup>

## Who is most at risk?

Meningococcal disease can occur at any age. Children under 5 years of age, and adolescents aged 15–19 years are most at risk.<sup>3</sup>

## Signs and symptoms

Early symptoms can be difficult to recognise as they may be similar to a flu-like illness.<sup>5</sup>

However, symptoms can progress quickly. Some of the symptoms may include:<sup>1,5</sup>

- Fever
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Neck stiffness
- Discomfort when looking at bright lights
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Confusion
- Rash of red or purple pinpoint spots or larger bruises

In babies only:<sup>1,5</sup>

- High-pitched moaning cry
- Difficult feeding
- A bulging fontanelle (soft spot on top of the head)

**If you suspect your child has meningococcal disease seek medical attention immediately.**

**The meningococcal rash can often be a late sign of the disease and may or may not appear.<sup>1,6</sup>**

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Jolie Ann  
Meningococcal survivor

The consequences of meningococcal disease vary between patients, and the symptoms displayed may not be representative of every patient's experience.

### What happens if meningococcal disease is not diagnosed or treated early?

Meningococcal disease is rare and most people survive.<sup>1</sup> If meningococcal disease is not diagnosed or treated quickly, it can lead to long-term disability or death within 24–48 hours.<sup>1,2</sup>



Up to **1 in 5** may have long-term disability including brain damage, deafness and loss of limbs<sup>2,5</sup>



Up to **1 in 10** may die<sup>2,5</sup>

### Treatment

Early recognition and treatment of meningococcal disease offers the best chance of recovery.<sup>4,6</sup> People with meningococcal disease are usually admitted to hospital for treatment, with some people requiring intensive care.<sup>1</sup>

### Prevention

Good hygiene practices are important in helping to prevent the spread of germs.<sup>1</sup>

Vaccines are available to help prevent meningococcal disease—different vaccines protect against different strains of meningococcal disease.<sup>1</sup>

**Talk to your doctor to learn more about meningococcal disease and how to help protect your family.**

**References:** 1. Health Direct. Meningococcal Disease. Available at: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/meningococcal-disease> [Accessed October 2024]. 2. World Health Organization. Meningitis. Available at: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/meningitis> [Accessed October 2024]. 3. Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Australian Meningococcal Surveillance Programme Annual Report 2022. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33321/cdi.2023.47.44> [Accessed October 2024]. 4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Meningococcal Disease. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/index.html> [Accessed October 2024]. 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Meningococcal Disease Symptoms and Complications. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/symptoms/index.html> [Accessed October 2024]. 6. The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. Meningococcal Infection. Available at: [https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Meningococcal\\_infection/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Meningococcal_infection/) [Accessed October 2024].