



Meningitis – Know the Facts

Meningitis is a devastating disease that can affect anyone, at any time – striking in minutes and killing within hours. Although the disease affects all ages, over half of cases will be in children under 5, and so vigilance is essential.

There are 3000 reported cases of meningitis each year in the UK, and of those, over 300 will be left with disabling after-effects, including brain damage, hearing and sight loss and, where septicaemia (blood poisoning) has occurred, loss of limbs and scarring.

The **early symptoms** of meningitis can easily be mistaken for those of flu and include:











- fever
- headache
- stiff neck
- dislike of bright light
- drowsiness
- joint pain
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- confusion
- rash

Symptoms can appear in any order and some may not appear at all. It is important to err on the side of caution, be aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis, and seek medical attention as a matter of urgency if you suspect the disease.

With no vaccine available to protect against all strains of the disease, the only way to protect yourself and your children is to **know the signs** to look out for and to act quickly if concerned.

Babies and Toddlers

Meningitis and Septicaemia often occur Together

 Fever, cold hands & feet	 Floppy, listless, unresponsive
 Refusing food	 Drowsy, difficult to wake
 Vomiting	 Spots/Rash <small>see Glass Test</small>
 Pale, blotchy skin	 Rapid breathing or grunting
 Fretful, dislike being handled	 Unusual cry, moaning

Trust your instincts – Get medical help immediately

Types of Meningitis

Meningococcal disease is a life-threatening infection. It is a term used to describe two major illnesses – meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). These can occur on their own or more commonly both together. It can strike at any age, but most cases occur in babies and young children.

Pneumococcal meningitis is a life-threatening infection. Most cases occur in babies and young children under 18 months of age.

Hib meningitis is caused by the bacterium Haemophilus influenzae type b. This type of meningitis is usually seen in babies and children under the age of four.

TB The bacterium Mycobacterium tuberculosis usually begins by infecting the lungs, but in about 2% of cases the bacteria travel via the bloodstream to the meninges and cause TB meningitis.

Neonatal Some forms of meningitis particularly affect new-born babies. The most common causes are group B streptococcus (Streptococcus agalactiae) and E.coli bacteria.

Fungal Some fungi can occasionally cause meningitis, but the disease is very rare. It usually occurs when the immune system has been affected by disease, e.g. HIV infection, or by drug therapy.

Viral meningitis is usually a mild disease but it can make people very unwell. Many thousands of cases occur each year, mostly affecting babies and children.

For more information go to www.meningitis-trust.org or call the 24hr helpline: 0800 028 18 28