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Prevention

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Meningitis typically results from contagious infections. Common bacteria or viruses that can cause meningitis can spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing eating utensils, a toothbrush or a cigarette. You're also at increased risk if you live or work with someone who has the disease.

These steps can help prevent meningitis:

- **Wash your hands.** Careful hand-washing is important to avoiding exposure to infectious agents. Teach your children to wash their hands often, especially before they eat and after using the toilet,

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spending time in a crowded public place or petting animals. Show them how to wash their hands vigorously, covering both the front and back of each hand with soap and rinsing thoroughly under running water.

- **Practice good hygiene.** Don't share drinks, foods, straws, eating utensils, lip balms or toothbrushes with anyone else. Teach children and teens to avoid sharing these items too.
- **Stay healthy.** Maintain your immune system by getting enough rest, exercising regularly, and eating a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- **Cover your mouth.** When you need to cough or sneeze, be sure to cover your mouth and nose.
- **If you're pregnant, take care with food.** Reduce your risk of listeriosis if you're pregnant by cooking meat, including hot dogs and deli meat, to 165 F (74 C), and avoiding soft cheeses made from unpasteurized milk, including feta, queso, Brie and Camembert. Don't eat these types of cheeses unless they're clearly labeled that they were made with pasteurized milk.

Immunizations

Some forms of bacterial meningitis are preventable with the following vaccinations:

- **Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) vaccine.** Children in the United States routinely receive this vaccine as part of the recommended schedule of vaccines, starting at about 2 months of age. The vaccine is also recommended for some adults, including those who have sickle cell disease or AIDS and those who don't have a spleen.
- **Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV7).** This vaccine also is part of the regular immunization schedule for children younger than 2 years in the United States. In addition, it's recommended for children between the ages of 2 and 5 who are at high risk of pneumococcal disease, including children who have chronic heart or lung disease or cancer.
- **Haemophilus influenzae type b and Neisseria meningitidis serogroups C and Y vaccine (Hib-MenCY).** This vaccine is recommended for children younger than 19 months, but not younger than 6 weeks, who are at high risk of meningococcal disease. This includes children with an improperly functioning spleen and sickle cell anemia. The vaccine is given in four doses, at age 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and between ages 12 months and 15 months.
- **Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV).** Older children and adults who need protection from pneumococcal bacteria may receive this vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the PPSV vaccine for all adults older than 65, for younger adults and children who have weak immune systems or chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes or sickle cell anemia, and for those who don't have a spleen.
- **Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4).** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that a single dose of MCV4 be given to children ages 11 to 12, with a booster shot given at age 16. If the vaccine is first given between ages 13 and 15, the booster shot is recommended between 16 and 18. If the

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first shot is given at 16 or older, no booster is necessary.

This vaccine can also be given to younger children who are at high risk of bacterial meningitis or who have been exposed to someone with the disease. It's approved for use in children as young as 9 months old. It's also used to vaccinate healthy people who have been exposed in outbreaks but have not been previously vaccinated.

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