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Health Department

FACTS&details

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Bacterial Meningitis

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What is bacterial meningitis?

Bacterial meningitis is a vaccine-preventable infection of the bloodstream and the thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord.

What are the symptoms of bacterial meningitis?

Common symptoms of meningitis in anyone over the age of 2 years are high fever, headache and stiff neck. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, confusion and sleepiness. In newborns and small infants, the classic symptoms of fever, headache and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect. Infants may only appear slow or inactive, be irritable vomit, and/or feed poorly. As the disease progresses, patients of any age may have seizures.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

The symptoms of bacterial meningitis can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within 3-7 days after exposure.

How long is the diagnosed person contagious?

The duration varies among individuals and with the treatment used.

How is meningitis spread?

Bacteria is spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, kissing). Fortunately, none of the bacteria that causes meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

How is meningitis treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease, as meningitis can be fatal.

How can you prevent meningitis?

There are vaccines for the three main causes of bacterial meningitis: Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib), Neisseria meningitidis and Streptococcus pneumoniae. It is recommended that the vaccine against Hib be given to children between 2 and 15 months of age, and then to children over the age of 5 or adults with certain medical conditions.

The vaccine against Neisseria meningitidis (meningococcal vaccine) is routinely recommended for children at ages 11 or 12. It is also recommended for individuals living in college or military dorms, people with certain immune disorders and medical conditions, and travelers to countries with known meningococcal outbreaks.

There are two types of vaccines against Streptococcus pneumonia (pneumococcal vaccines). One is routinely given to children under 2; the other is given to adults over the age of 65, and some younger adults and children with weakened immune systems and certain diseases.

Meningococcal vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Health Department. Call 316-660-7300 to schedule a vaccine appointment. Local physicians may also have the vaccine.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County
Health Department Epidemiology Office at
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County website at
www.sedgwickcounty.org.