



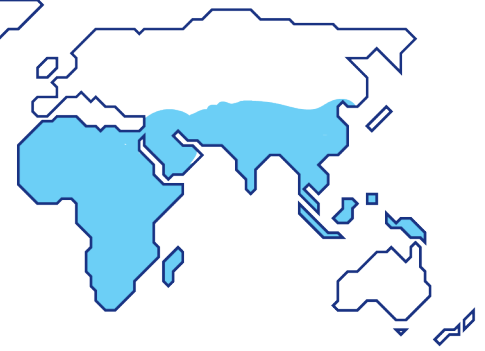
What

Bacterial meningitis is an infection of the tissues surrounding the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by various bacteria, such as *Neisseria meningitidis*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, group B streptococci, *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and others. Some are spread through food, while others are transmitted via respiratory secretions. In the case of anatomical defects, skin bacteria may also lead to this infection.



Who

Bacterial meningitis is a very serious infection that can affect people of all ages. It may be contagious and cause outbreaks. It can rapidly progress to death. Since the introduction of routine infant vaccination, its occurrence has decreased. Higher rates of infection in certain areas are partly due to poverty, overcrowding, and poor sanitation. Other risk factors for contracting the infection include anatomical defects of the brain, skull, or inner ear, or a weakened immune system



Where and when

Global meningitis epidemiology is highly dynamic. Currently, outbreaks are often caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, which regularly occurs in the so-called 'meningitis belt' of sub-Saharan Africa, especially during the dry season. Pilgrims on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca are at an increased risk of infection due to overcrowding and are required to be vaccinated prior to travel.

Prevention

Vaccinations for the most common bacteria that cause meningitis are available and are currently included in most infant vaccination programs. Please consult your travel doctor to determine whether additional vaccinations may be required. In some cases, you may need antibiotics if you have been in contact with someone who has meningitis. General adherence to basic hygiene practices can also help prevent infection.

Symptoms

There are three classic symptoms of acute bacterial meningitis: fever, nuchal rigidity (stiff neck), and a change in mental status or headache. These three symptoms together occur in about 40% of people with meningitis. Other common symptoms include nausea, photophobia, seizures, and partial paralysis. Symptoms typically develop within 3 to 7 days.



Treatment

Anyone who thinks they (or someone they know) may have meningitis should see a doctor as soon as possible. If meningitis is suspected, blood tests and analysis of cerebrospinal fluid should be performed. Broad-spectrum intravenous antibiotics should be started immediately. Identifying the cause is important in order to provide the best treatment.

In case of infection

Bacterial meningitis has a significant mortality rate, even with the administration of appropriate antibiotics. The outcome depends on the type of infection and how soon antibiotic treatment is started. Neurologic complications may occur in up to 50% of cases and can include impaired mental status, seizures, hearing loss, intellectual impairment, and paralysis.