

## **Bacterial Meningitis**

The following information on Bacterial Meningitis is for information only and does NOT indicate an outbreak in our area. The Texas Legislature recently passed SB 31, which requires that a school district provide information relating to bacterial meningitis to all students and their parents each school year.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. Viruses, parasites, fungi, and bacteria can cause meningitis. Someone with meningitis will become very ill. The illness may develop over one or two days, but it can also rapidly progress in a matter of hours. Not everyone with meningitis will have the same symptoms. Children (over 1 year old) and adults with meningitis may have:

1. Severe headache
2. High temperature
3. Vomiting
4. Sensitivity to bright lights
5. Neck stiffness, joint pains
6. Drowsiness or confusion

If diagnosed early and treated promptly, the majority of people make a complete recovery. In some cases it can be fatal or a person may be left with a permanent disability, such as deafness, blindness, amputations or brain damage (resulting in mental retardation or paralysis) even with prompt treatment.

Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as such diseases as 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. The germs live naturally in the back of our noses and throats, but they do not live for long outside the body. They are spread when people exchange saliva (such as by kissing; sharing drinking containers, utensils, or cigarettes). The germ does not cause meningitis in most people. Instead, most people become carriers of the germ for days, weeks or even months. Being a carrier helps to stimulate your body's natural defense system. The bacteria rarely overcomes the body's immune system to cause meningitis or another serious illness.

Bacterial meningitis can be prevented by not sharing food, drinks, utensils, toothbrushes, or cigarettes. A vaccine is available that can prevent certain types of meningitis caused by meningococcal bacteria. This vaccine is recommended by some groups for college students, particularly freshmen living in dorms or residence halls. The vaccine is safe and effective (85%-90%). It can cause mild side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to two days. Immunity develops within 7 to 10 days after the vaccine is given and lasts for up to 5 years. For additional information, contact your school nurse, family doctor, or the staff at your local or regional health department.