

MENINGITIS – BE AWARE AND SHOW YOU CARE

Meningitis is the infectious disease every parent and Childminder dreads. In the early stages symptoms can be mistaken for colds, flu, even teething problems, so it's vital to know the signs, to be vigilant and trust your instincts. If in doubt, seek medical help immediately.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis means inflammation of the meninges, the lining surrounding the brain. Viral meningitis is not usually serious but, like flu, can make you very unwell. The less common bacterial form, however, can be life-threatening and needs to be treated in hospital with antibiotics – fast. One in 10 people with bacterial meningitis will die, while one in seven will be left with long-term disability, such as deafness, brain damage or, when septicaemia (blood poisoning) occurs, limb loss. There are four main types of bacterial meningitis in Ireland: meningococcal B, meningococcal C, pneumococcal and Hib.

Why are children at risk?

Children and babies are vulnerable because their immune systems aren't fully developed.

How is meningitis spread?

The bacteria that cause meningitis cannot live for more than a few seconds outside the body. So it requires close, prolonged contact with an infected person to develop meningitis – intimate kissing, sharing the same bed, the same household, exposure to coughing and sneezing.

What about vaccines?

The meningococcal Group C vaccine is part of the Childhood Immunisation Programme and can be given on request through GPs to everyone under 25 years. The Hib (haemophilus influenzae type B) vaccine is routinely given to babies to prevent Hib meningitis. The pneumococcal vaccine is given to children under three, who are considered to be at risk. No vaccine is yet available for meningococcal B, Ireland's most common bacterial form of meningitis.

CHILDREN & ADULTS



Fever – cold hands & feet



Vomiting



Headache



Stiff neck



Dislike of bright lights



Joint/muscle pain



Drowsy, difficult to wake



Confusion

The Meningitis Trust is here to help—You can call the Meningitis Trust's Nurse-led Helpline day or night on 1800 523 196, visit our website www.meningitis-trust.ie or contact Carole Nealon, Meningitis Trust Manager, 01 276 2050 during office hours.

You can obtain symptoms cards and leaflets by calling the Helpline or by emailing eolas@meningitis-trust.ie.