Overview: Meningitis

Meningitis is a disease caused by the inflammation of the protective membranes (called meninges) covering the brain and spinal cord. There are several different types of meningitis. Identifying the cause of the disease is important because the severity of the illness, as well as the treatment, can differ depending on the cause.1

Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease refers to any illness caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*.2 The majority of meningococcal disease cases worldwide are caused by 5 *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroups (A, C, Y, W, and B).3

*Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria can spread from person to person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions, which can occur through kissing, coughing, or drinking out of the same cup as an infected person.1

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly and early symptoms are difficult to distinguish from other more common infections, like the flu. Symptoms such as headache, nausea, and vomiting are among the earliest signs of both.1

Disease Incidence

- Meningococcal disease can occur at any age. Its incidence is highest in infants, adolescents and young adults, and the elderly.2
- Adolescents and young adults are the primary carriers of meningococcal bacteria, meaning they may harbor the pathogen in the back of the throat even if it does not make them sick.2
- Since infectious diseases tend to spread quickly wherever large groups of people gather, college students living in dormitories are at a slightly increased risk compared with other persons of the same age.4
- In 2012, the rate of meningococcal disease in the United States was 0.15 cases per 100,000 people; approximately 40% of the cases were due to meningococcal disease caused by serogroup B.5