

Meningococcal Disease Outbreaks: What Gay and Bisexual Men Need to Know

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but very serious bacterial illness. Even if treated quickly, meningococcal disease can cause long-term problems or be deadly. The best way to protect yourself during an outbreak is to get vaccinated.

Outbreaks are rare and unpredictable

Outbreaks can occur in many settings, including

- Communities
- Schools and colleges
- Detention and correctional facilities
- Other populations

In recent years in the United States, there have been several outbreaks primarily affecting gay and bisexual men. Since meningococcal disease is rare, just two cases in a setting or population over a few months might be considered an outbreak.

State and local health departments investigate outbreaks and determine

- Who is at increased risk during an outbreak
- How to best protect people's health and control the outbreak



Certain people are at increased risk

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, no matter their gender, age, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Certain medical conditions, including HIV, put people at increased risk. Being in an outbreak setting can also increase someone's risk of getting meningococcal disease.

Vaccines, antibiotics offer protection during outbreaks

State and local health departments make sure all close contacts of someone with meningococcal disease get antibiotics. They may also recommend people at increased risk get vaccinated.

There are two types of vaccines that help protect against meningococcal disease: **MenACWY** and **MenB** vaccines. Each vaccine protects against different serotypes (strains), so it's important that the recommended vaccine matches the strain causing the outbreak.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

People who were previously vaccinated may need a booster dose if they are at increased risk during an outbreak.

Contact your state or local health department to learn about their vaccine recommendations during an outbreak.

Vaccine side effects are usually mild

Meningococcal vaccines are safe. Most people who get a meningococcal vaccine do not have any serious problems with it. Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days. Serious reactions are possible, but rare.

Meningococcal bacteria are spread from person to person

People spread the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease to others through respiratory droplets and throat secretions (saliva or spit). Generally, it takes close (kissing) or lengthy (living together) contact to spread them.

Meningitis or bloodstream infection are common outcomes

With **meningococcal meningitis**, the lining of the brain and spinal cord becomes infected and swells. Symptoms include sudden onset of **fever, headache, and stiff neck**. There can be additional symptoms, such as

- Nausea and vomiting
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Confusion

With a **meningococcal bloodstream infection**, the bacteria damage the walls of the blood vessels and cause bleeding into the skin and organs. Symptoms may include

- Fever and chills
- Feeling tired
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Cold hands and feet
- Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest, or belly
- Rapid breathing
- A dark purple rash

Seek medical care right away if you have symptoms of meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease is very serious but treatable

Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics. It is important that treatment be started as soon as possible.

Meningococcal disease can be deadly in a matter of hours.

[cdc.gov/meningococcal/](https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/)

