

# Meningococcal Disease: What People Living with HIV Need to Know

People living with HIV are at increased risk for getting meningococcal disease, a rare, but very serious bacterial illness.



People are especially at increased risk if they have:

- A low CD4 count (number of certain cells in the blood that help fight infection)
- A high viral load (amount of HIV in the blood)

Meningococcal disease can cause long-term problems, like loss of limbs or brain damage, and be deadly. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent meningococcal disease.

## Meningococcal vaccines and boosters for people living with HIV

People ages 2 months or older living with HIV are recommended to receive a meningococcal vaccine called **MenACWY**. Booster doses of this vaccine are recommended throughout life.

## 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 and 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

In babies, these symptoms can be difficult to notice or may not be there at all. Instead, a baby may appear slow or inactive, be irritable, vomit, or feed poorly.

With a **meningococcal bloodstream infection**, the bacteria damage the walls of the blood vessels and cause bleeding into the skin and organs. Symptoms 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 or your child has 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)