

**Meningitis  
now**

# Meningitis can affect anyone

*Knowing the signs and  
symptoms can  
save lives*



## Meningitis can affect anyone

Meningitis can strike quickly and kill within hours - its impact can last a lifetime.

Babies and young children are the most at risk, with around half of all cases occurring in the under 5s. Risk increases again for teenagers and young adults and also in the over 55s.

Despite vaccines being available for some types of meningitis, there are still thousands of cases in the UK every year.

**Knowing the signs and symptoms to look out for and the action to take, saves lives.**



**Helen Richardson, who contracted meningococcal disease whilst at university.**

*"I started to get flu-like symptoms, which got progressively worse. Alarm bells started to ring so I checked my symptoms card. I had six of the symptoms. I went to hospital straight away. I'm so grateful I had the card, it saved my life."*

## What is meningitis?

Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. Many different organisms can cause meningitis, but the most common are viruses and bacteria.

**Viral meningitis** can make people very unwell but is rarely life-threatening. Most people make a good recovery, but it can be slow. Sufferers can be left with after-effects such as headaches, tiredness and memory loss.

**Bacterial meningitis** can kill, so urgent medical attention is essential. Most people make a good recovery, but some are left with lifelong after-effects such as deafness, brain damage and, where septicaemia occurs, limb loss.

## Meningococcal septicaemia

Meningococcal bacteria are the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK. They can cause both meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning), which people often have together. It is important to be aware of all the signs and symptoms.

## The rash

People with septicaemia may have a rash of tiny red 'pin pricks' which can develop into purple bruising.

**THIS RASH DOES NOT FADE UNDER PRESSURE. DO THE GLASS TEST.**



Press the side of a clear glass firmly against the skin.

Spots/rash may fade at first

Keep checking

- Fever with spots/rash that do not fade under pressure is a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**
- **DO NOT WAIT FOR A RASH**, if someone is ill and getting worse get medical help immediately
- **ON DARK SKIN** the spots/rash can be more difficult to see. Do not wait for a rash. Be aware of all the signs and symptoms.

# Be aware

Meningitis and septicaemia often happen together. Be aware of all the signs and symptoms.

Symptoms can appear in any order. Some may not appear at all.

Early symptoms can include:

fever headache vomiting diarrhoea

muscle pain stomach cramps

fever with cold hands and feet

Someone with meningitis or septicaemia can get a lot worse very quickly. Keep checking them.

Trust your instincts -  
get medical help  
immediately



If you are concerned it could be meningitis or septicaemia, you can:

Call NHS 111 or your GP

In an emergency you can:

- Dial 999 for an ambulance
- Go to your nearest accident and emergency department

Describe the symptoms and say you think it could be meningitis or septicaemia.

Early diagnosis can be difficult. If you have had advice and are still concerned, get medical help again.

## Common signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia

Knowing the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia saves lives. Make sure you know what to look for. Download our free app at [www.meningitisapp.co.uk](http://www.meningitisapp.co.uk)

### Babies and Toddlers



Fever, cold hands and feet



Refusing food and vomiting



Fretful, dislike being handled



Drowsy, floppy, unresponsive



Rapid breathing or grunting



Pale, blotchy skin  
Spots/rash  
**See Glass Test**



Unusual cry, moaning



Tense, bulging fontanelle (soft spot)



Stiff neck, dislike bright lights



Convulsions/seizures

### Children and Adults



Fever, cold hands and feet



Vomiting



Drowsy, difficult to wake



Confusion and irritability



Severe muscle pain



Pale, blotchy skin  
Spots/rash  
**See Glass Test**



Severe headache



Stiff neck



Dislike bright lights



Convulsions/seizures

## Treatment

If you suspect meningitis it is important to get help as soon as possible. Someone with bacterial meningitis and septicaemia needs rapid admission to hospital and urgent treatment with antibiotics. If they are recognised and treated early, they are less likely to become life-threatening or cause serious after-effects.

## Prevention

Vaccines are available to prevent some types of meningitis and have dramatically reduced the number of cases. Most of these vaccines are part of the UK routine immunisation schedule and are offered from 2 months of age.

**Until there are vaccines to prevent all types, it is important to know the signs and symptoms and act quickly.**

## After meningitis and septicaemia

Most people who have meningitis and septicaemia will make a good recovery, but some will suffer after-effects.

After-effects are more common following bacterial meningitis or septicaemia. Families can be bereaved and survivors can be left with lifelong disabilities such as deafness, epilepsy, brain damage, limb loss, learning difficulties and behavioural problems.

Viral meningitis is usually less serious but can still have a big impact, leaving people with headaches, fatigue and memory loss. Recovery is usually complete, but can be very slow.

**Whatever the outcome, people's lives can be changed forever.**

For more information about after-effects visit [www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org)

Meningitis can devastate lives within hours and its impact can last a lifetime.

**Meningitis Now is here to help you, when you need us and for as long as you need us.**

We offer on-going support for all those living with the impact of the disease. We support individuals, and their families, including those who have been bereaved, helping to rebuild lives after meningitis and septicaemia.

We can:

- Listen; and answer your questions about meningitis and septicaemia
- Talk to you about your individual experience and how we can tailor our help to you
- Provide support locally to you
- Put you in touch with others who have been through it too
- Support you and those closest to you; children, teenagers and adults

If you are interested in finding out how we can help, give us a call and we can talk everything through.

**Meningitis Helpline: 0808 80 10 388 (UK)**

**Email: [helpline@meningitisnow.org](mailto:helpline@meningitisnow.org)**

**Health Unlocked online community:**  
<https://healthunlocked.com/meningitisnow>

**Meningitis Now is the UK's largest meningitis charity. We are saving lives and rebuilding futures through awareness, research and support.**

We couldn't do this without your invaluable support, determined spirit and dedication.

Here's how you can help:

### Become a volunteer

If you have some spare time or energy, there are many ways you can help us reach more people and raise awareness of meningitis.

### Share your experience

Sharing your experience of meningitis can empower others to ask for the information and support they need to help with their own recovery.

### Raise some money

Take part in one of our extreme challenges or simply host afternoon tea with friends - there are so many ways you can raise money and have fun doing it.

### Make a donation

By giving a single donation, setting up a direct debit or leaving a legacy, you can help make a real difference.



**Meningitis Helpline: 0808 80 10 388 (UK)**

**Email: [helpline@meningitisnow.org](mailto:helpline@meningitisnow.org)**

**[www.MeningitisNow.org](http://www.MeningitisNow.org)**

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