

## Be aware, be prepared

Meningitis and meningococcal septicaemia (blood poisoning) are serious diseases that can affect anyone at any time. Fortunately, most young people in the UK have already had the MenC vaccine, but if you haven't or can't remember, getting vaccinated is a good way to protect yourself.

But remember, **vaccines can't prevent all forms of meningitis and septicaemia**. So it is very important that you are aware of the **signs and symptoms** so that you can get medical help urgently if you become ill.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

Many of the early signs – vomiting, fever, aches, general tiredness and headaches – are **also signs of less serious illnesses like** colds and flu (see Jennifer's story) but someone with meningitis or septicaemia will **usually become seriously ill in a matter of hours**.

This is why it is very important to look out for the signs and symptoms and seek medical help urgently **if you think you or someone else is developing meningitis or septicaemia**.

### The main signs and symptoms Meningitis:

- fever
- very bad headache
- vomiting
- stiff neck
- dislike of bright lights
- rash\*
- confusion, delirium
- severe sleepiness, losing consciousness
- seizures

### Septicaemia:

- fever and shivering
- vomiting
- severe pains and aches in limbs and joints
- very cold hands and feet
- pale or mottled skin
- rapid breathing
- diarrhoea and stomach cramps
- red or purple spots/rash that do not fade under pressure – do the glass test shown opposite
- difficulty walking or standing
- severe sleepiness, losing consciousness

Not everyone will develop all these symptoms – they can appear in any order and be mixed between the two illnesses.

\*On dark skin, check inside the eyelids or roof of the mouth where the spots maybe more visible.



### The glass test

Press the side of a glass firmly against the rash so you can see if it fades under pressure. If it doesn't, get medical help immediately. If you are feeling very ill, get help anyway, even if the rash fades or doesn't appear at all.

It's important too to look for **cold hands and feet, severe limb pain and pale and blotchy skin**, as these tend to develop early in the illness. Symptoms such as **a rash that doesn't fade, being confused or delirious, or too sleepy to wake** are very serious.

### How is meningitis spread?

The bacteria that cause these diseases are spread by coughing, sneezing and intimate kissing. Outbreaks tend to occur where people live or work closely together, such as university halls of residence.



### Jennifer's story

Jennifer was in her **first year at university when she had meningitis and septicaemia.**

'I considered myself the average student. I didn't know the symptoms of meningitis or septicaemia and was unaware of any risks of getting these diseases at university.

One day **I had a sore throat.** The next day I felt fine but by the evening I was unwell and **threw up a couple of times.** **I thought I had flu.**

When I woke up in the morning, **my neck really hurt.** By 2pm, I was really ill and my **condition was deteriorating rapidly.** I had **terrible pains in my joints** and the **worst headache** I had ever had. When I got up I just **collapsed.**

I was taken to A&E and within minutes I was in **a coma** in intensive care for two days. Only there did my mother notice **a rash on my back.**

I have now made a full recovery though sometimes find it difficult to concentrate for long periods and still get headaches. I didn't know the symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia and **didn't get medical help as quickly as I should have done.** I know just how lucky I have been and that not everyone is as fortunate.

If you haven't had the MenC vaccine, make sure you get it and also make sure you know the symptoms.

**It could happen to anyone.  
It happened to me!**

**If you keep an eye out for your friends, and aren't afraid to ask them how they're feeling, you could be saving their life.**

For more information contact:  
**Meningitis Research Foundation**  
Free 24 hour helpline **080 8800 3344**  
**[www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org)**

**Meningitis Trust**  
Free 24 hour helpline **0800 028 1828**  
**[www.meningitis-trust.org](http://www.meningitis-trust.org)**

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**NHS**  
Immunisation Information

# DON'T IGNORE The signs



# Meningitis

**Meningitis can kill in hours**

**It could happen to anyone**

**It could happen to you!**