

# Meningitis (bacterial) and meningococcal disease: recognition, diagnosis and management

Information for the public  
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## Bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease: the care you should expect

Meningitis is an infection of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by a virus or by bacteria, but this guideline only covers bacterial meningitis.

Meningococcal disease is when meningococcal bacteria (one of the main causes of meningitis) spreads to the blood.

Bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease are both rare, but they can be life-threatening, particularly if they are not treated quickly. They can also cause long-term problems, including disabilities such as brain damage.

Bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease are medical emergencies, and need to be treated with antibiotics in hospital.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with bacterial meningitis or meningococcal disease by making sure:

- healthcare professionals know what symptoms and signs to look out for
- if a healthcare professional suspects bacterial meningitis or meningococcal disease, they send the person to hospital as an emergency (for example, by ambulance)
- people get the right tests in hospital – these will usually be done before antibiotics are given (although they may need to start antibiotics before the results of the tests are available)
- people are given antibiotics within 1 hour of arrival at hospital
- afterwards, people get the right care to help with complications – this could include psychological support, a hearing test and assessment for hearing aids, physiotherapy to help with mobility problems, and care for damage to the skin, arms and legs
- people get the long-term support they need to recover – this will include a follow-up appointment 4 to 6 weeks after leaving hospital
- babies, children and young people get further assessments to check for problems with their learning and development (for example, problems at school).

## Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns. They should tailor your care to your specific experiences, needs, and circumstances.

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

## Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about meningitis.

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [Brain and Spine Foundation](#), 0808 808 1000
- [Meningitis Now](#), 0808 80 10 388
- [Meningitis Research Foundation](#), 080 8800 3344

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease, and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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