

Meningitis: what it is and what to look for

By [Eleanor Mason](#), Science Editor (2016/17)
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Following a recent case of meningococcal meningitis in York, an email was dispatched to students at the university, providing reassurance that the spreading of the disease was very unlikely. Most students should have received their Meningococcal meningitis vaccinations (MenC and Men ACWY) prior coming to university at the age of around 18. The vaccination in question can prevent the conduction of various meningitis types. Between birth and becoming a fresher, a person should receive various meningitis vaccines, including MMR, men B, 5-in-1 vaccine and the pneumococcal vaccine.



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Meningitis can stem from various causes, however most cases derive from bacterial or viral organisms. Viral meningitis is the most common yet less harmful strain, and bacterial meningitis is rare, but can be very serious without fast treatment. It can be summarised as the inflammation of membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. The bacteria and viruses that cause the disease can be spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing and sharing utensils, cutlery and toothbrushes.

Meningitis can strike quickly, but its effects can last for a lifetime; scarring, loss of limbs, brain damage, hearing loss and blood poisoning are some of the severe after-effects of the disease. As it can affect anyone, at any time and can kill within hours, urgent medical attention is necessary if symptoms arise. Although the vaccinations students have most likely received will protect them from some types of meningitis, other types are not covered, and so it is very important to be aware of the signs of the disease.

Early symptoms include fever, headaches, vomiting, cold hands and feet, confusion and drowsiness. Other symptoms include a rash that does not fade under pressure, severe muscle pains, stiff neck, seizures, a dislike of bright lights and pale, blotchy skin.

Viral, bacterial, meningococcal (and septicaemia), pneumococcal, TB, Group B, HIB and fungal meningitis are the different strains of the disease within the UK. Contact your GP or call NHS 111 if you think you may have been exposed to somebody with meningitis, or call 999 if you think you or anybody you know may be seriously ill. It is always important to be aware of your health, and the signs that could potentially harm you. Don't wait for a rash to form and always trust your instincts.



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