

Meningitis can occur at any time of the year, but it is most prevalent in the winter months, so it is vital everyone becomes more vigilant of the signs and symptoms. It is critical that the symptoms are noticed at the earliest opportunity, to allow early intervention with antibiotics.

Meningitis is most commonly caused by the meningococcus bacterium. It causes inflammation of the brain lining and/or septicaemia (blood poisoning). Infection can occur at any age, though the majority of infections occur in children under four years old. Teenagers are also a particularly vulnerable group.

Early symptoms of the disease may include:

- sudden onset of high fever;
- a severe and worsening headache without any other obvious cause;
- severe neck stiffness;
- dislike of bright lights;
- very cold hands and feet;
- drowsiness that can deteriorate so someone is difficult to wake or even unconscious;
- a rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass (this is due to bleeding under the skin).

Babies with meningococcal disease tend to be irritable when picked up and have a high pitched cry, stiff body and jerking movements.

Symptoms of meningitis are often non-specific and easily mistaken for other illnesses such as flu, but the disease can come on very quickly and it is important to seek urgent medical attention if you think meningitis is occurring.

A very important sign is a rash which does not disappear if a glass is pressed against it. If someone develops this then they need urgent medical attention. It can appear anywhere on the body so it is important to check under clothing. However the rash doesn't always appear, so don't wait for it to appear before seeking medical attention if other signs are present.

Further information on meningococcal infection can be found at:

<https://www.meningitis.org/meningitis/check-symptoms>

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