Meningococcal disease (bacterial meningitis)

What is meningococcal meningitis?
Meningococcal meningitis (Neisseria meningitidis) is a severe invasive bacterial infection. Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining (meninges) that surround the brain and spinal cord. The bacteria can also infect the blood (septicemia).

Other types of bacteria that cause meningitis:
Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib meningitis) and Streptococcus pneumonia (pneumococcal meningitis).

What are the symptoms?
The average time period from exposure to symptom onset is 1 - 10 days (average is usually 2-3 days):
- High fever
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck and back
- Rash
- Extreme tiredness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mental confusion
- Bulging soft spot on infants head
- Progression to unresponsiveness and coma, if untreated

How long is a person contagious?
A person is capable of transmitting the bacteria from the time they are first infected and for 24 hours after starting an effective antimicrobial treatment.

How is meningococcal disease treated?
Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important that treatment be started early in the course of disease to reduce the risk of serious complications or death.

Can you get meningitis more than once?
Yes. Meningitis can be caused by different subtypes of the meningococcal bacterium, therefore, even being vaccinated or having had the disease will not protect you against these other sources of infection.

Is there a vaccine available?
Yes, there are vaccines against the most common strains of meningitis in the United States. Check with your physician for the most current recommendations.
(Note: Routine vaccination is not recommended for children aged 2-10 years and adults aged >55 years who are not identified as being at increased risk for meningococcal disease.)

How can I prevent the spread of meningitis?
Vaccination is the best defense against bacterial meningitis. Practice good hygiene by washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes. Do not share eating utensils, drink containers, lip stick, or tobacco products. Cases should be immediately reported to the health department to assure follow-up of close contacts and recognize outbreaks.

For further information visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html

For safe travelling tips:

Promptly report Meningitis cases to Saint Louis County Department of Public Health by calling 314 615 1630