

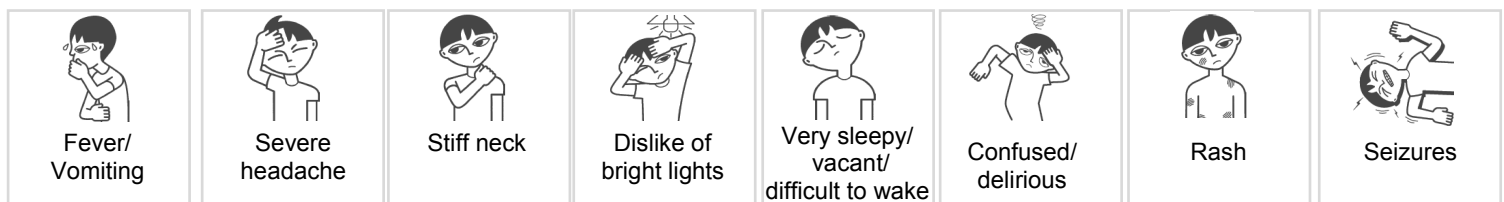
Meningitis, septicaemia and meningococcal disease

Symptoms of meningitis, septicaemia and meningococcal disease can occur in any order.
Not everyone gets all the symptoms.

What is meningitis?

- Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord caused by viruses or bacteria:
 - ⇒ Viral meningitis is milder than bacterial meningitis. Most people recover within 5 to 14 days without treatment.
 - ⇒ Bacterial meningitis is less common than viral meningitis but more serious, and needs urgent treatment.
- Meningitis can affect anyone, but is most common in babies, young children and teenagers.
- As early symptoms for both viral and bacterial meningitis can be similar, it is important to contact your GP immediately. If GP is unable to see the patient urgently, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Symptoms may include:

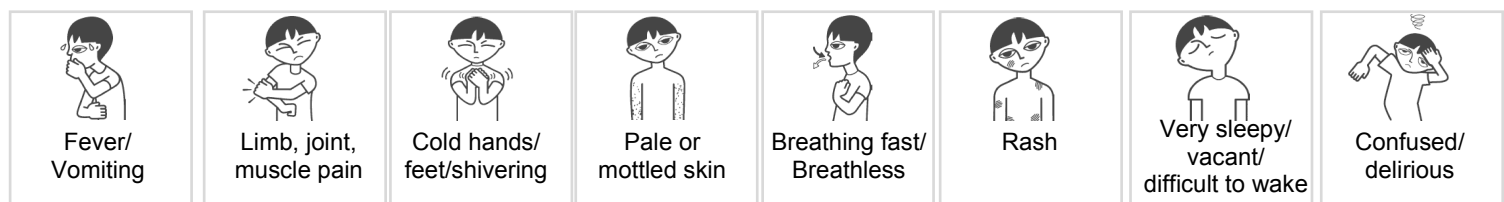


What is septicaemia?

Septicaemia (blood poisoning) is caused when bacteria enter the bloodstream releasing poisons which make you feel unwell and feverish. The bacteria damages the walls of blood vessels, causing blood to leak. This shows up on the skin as a rash which may start as tiny blood spots that look like red pin-prick type marks. These marks do not fade during a glass test and, if untreated, can spread to form bruises or blood blisters. The rash is not the only symptom of septicaemia, so do not wait for it to appear before getting medical help.



Symptoms of septicaemia may include:



The Meningitis Baby Watch picture on page 2 of this leaflet has a full list of symptoms to look out for in babies

What is meningococcal disease and how does it spread?

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection caused by the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium. It is a term that refers to meningitis and septicaemia, which often occur together. It is most common from September to April. The infections are spread by people who are not sick but who are carrying the bacteria in the back of their nose or throat and through cough or saliva. It does not spread through water or food.

Treating Meningitis

With an early diagnosis, the urgent antibiotic treatment of bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease increases the chance of a full recovery. Antibiotics are also given to close contacts. For viral meningitis, routine antibiotics are not given. Most people recover within 5 to 14 days without any medical treatment.

Vaccination and prevention of meningococcal disease:

The best way to prevent meningitis is to ensure your child is up to date with all their vaccines. Vaccines do not prevent every kind of meningitis, so if your child has symptoms that suggest meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help urgently.

There are different types of meningococcal bacteria, including groups A, B, C, W135 and Y. Vaccines for groups B and C are part of the primary childhood immunisation schedule in Ireland.

- ⇒ Meningitis B vaccine : Meningococcal group B is responsible for 80-85% of meningococcal meningitis and septicaemia cases in Ireland each year. Meningitis B vaccine is given to children at 2, 4 and 12 months of age.
- ⇒ **MenC Vaccine:** Meningococcal group C conjugate vaccine (MenC) is given to children at 6 months of age. Children also receive a booster at 13 months and as a teenager.

Meningitis Baby Watch: Is your baby getting worse fast? Babies can get ill very quickly, so check often:

High temperature – in babies under 3 months, it can be normal or low

Very sleepy or staring expression or too sleepy to wake up

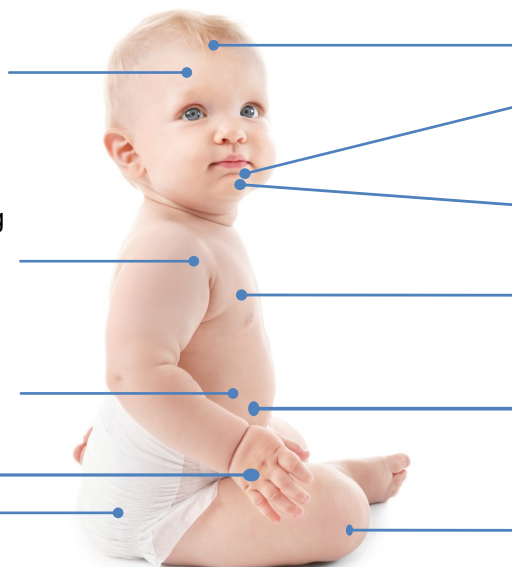
Blotchy skin, getting paler or turning blue

Extreme shivering

'Pin prick' rash or marks or purple bruises anywhere on the body

Cold hands and feet

Diarrhoea



Tense or bulging soft spot

Vomiting or refusing to feed

Unusual grunting sounds

Irritable when picked up, high pitched, moaning or odd cry

Breathing body with jerky movements, or floppy and lifeless

A stiff body with jerky movements, or floppy and lifeless

Pain or irritability from muscle aches or severe limb or joint pain

Not every baby gets all these symptoms and symptoms can appear in any order.
If you feel “something is wrong”, **get medical help quickly.**



The National Maternity Hospital, Infection Control Department, June 2022