

What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is defined as an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. It's caused when the protective membranes around the brain and spinal cord known as the meninges become infected.

There are actually several types of meningitis but **bacterial and viral meningitis are the 2 most common types.**

• **Bacterial Meningitis**

Bacterial meningitis is usually severe and can even be deadly. For example, though rare, meningococcal meningitis is a type of bacterial meningitis that can cause:

- Serious complications, such as amputations, scarring, and brain damage in about 1 in 5 people
- Death in 10%-15% of cases even when appropriate antibiotic therapy is used

Fortunately, most of the bacteria that cause meningitis are not as contagious as the viruses that cause the common cold or the flu. Meningitis-causing bacteria aren't usually spread through casual contact with someone who is infected. Rather, the bacteria that cause meningococcal meningitis are spread through the exchange of respiratory secretions (eg, kissing, sharing drinks, or sharing eating utensils) with someone who is infected.

Most importantly, unlike the most common forms of viral meningitis, the most common forms of bacterial meningitis are vaccine-preventable.

• **Viral Meningitis**

Though it can be fatal, viral meningitis is often less severe than bacterial meningitis. Most people with viral meningitis usually recover in 7 to 10 days without specific treatment. The most common forms of viral meningitis are not preventable with a vaccine.

The viruses that commonly cause meningitis can spread the same way that bacterial meningitis does (eg, through kissing, sharing drinks, or sharing eating utensils). Also, viral meningitis, which is more prevalent during the summer and fall months, has symptoms that are similar to those of bacterial meningitis, including:

- Sudden fever
- Stiff neck
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Nausea
- Light sensitivity

Viral meningitis can affect anyone though it occurs mostly in children younger than 5 years of age. If you believe that you or a loved one has viral meningitis, see a doctor immediately.

Why Are Teens at a Higher Risk?

They may not know it, but teenagers and young adults are at increased risk of getting meningococcal disease (meningitis).

- Of note, about 10% to 15% of the 800 to 1200 Americans who get meningococcal meningitis each year will die.

Lifestyle

Certain lifestyle factors and behaviors are thought to put healthy preteens and teens at greater risk of meningitis infection, including [1,4-7](#):

- Sharing drinking glasses, sharing eating utensils, or water bottles
- Kissing
- Smoking (or being exposed to smoke)
- Living in close quarters (ie, dormitories)

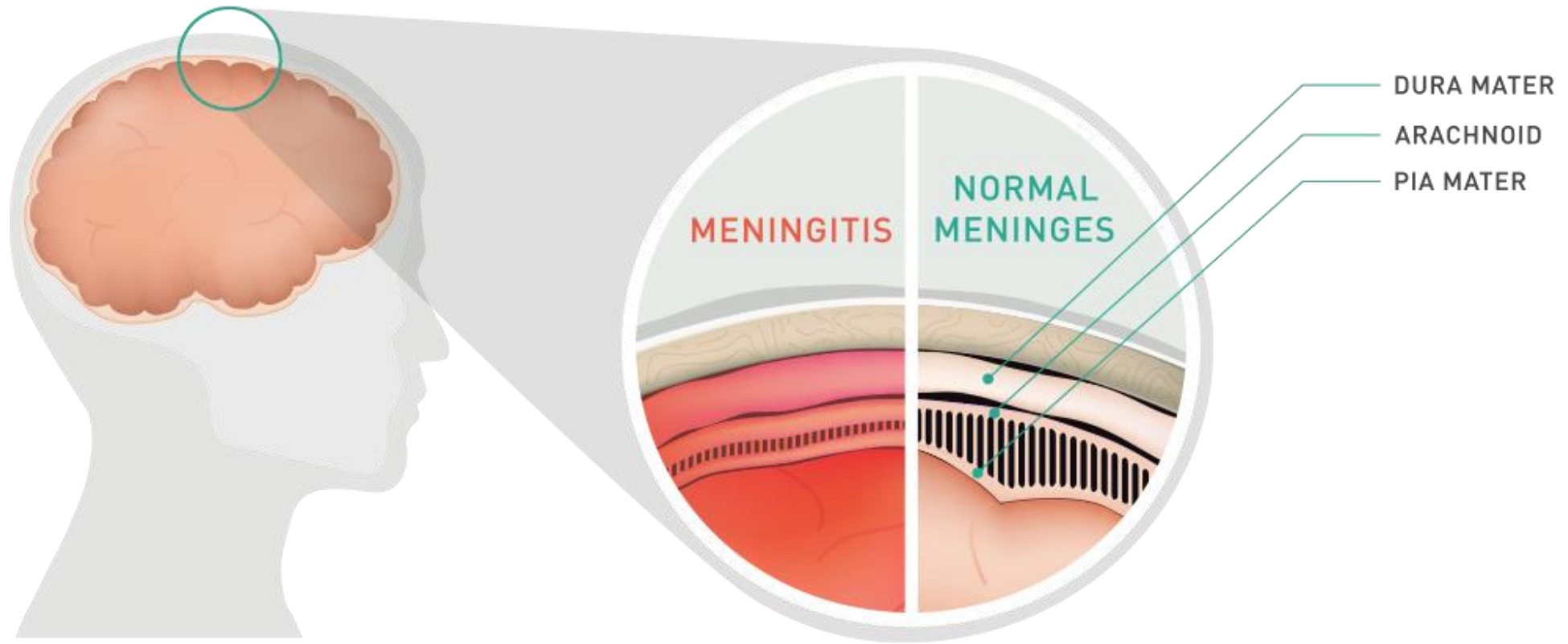
Meningococcal Meningitis Vaccination

Who Should Get Vaccinated?

Teens and young adults are at increased risk for meningococcal meningitis.

- **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** recommends 2 doses of quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine for adolescents 11 through 18 years of age.
 - **The first dose should be given at 11 or 12 years of age, followed by a booster dose at age 16**
 - **If the first dose is given at 13 through 15 years of age, the booster should be given at 16 through 18 years of age**

Getting your child vaccinated is the best way to help protect preteens and teens from meningococcal disease. Meningitis vaccines are available for people who wish to reduce their risk of contracting the disease.



Is Meningitis Contagious?

- Yes, the bacteria that cause it can be spread through the exchange of saliva, which can occur during common activities, such as:



Kissing



Sharing utensils & drinking glasses

- **Risk factors for meningococcal meningitis include:**



Living in close quarters (ie, dormitories)



Smoking or being exposed to smoke

Lifestyle may also play a part. For example, staying out late and irregular sleeping habits can make teens feel run down and might also put them at greater risk for meningitis by weakening their immune system.

