What should I look out for?

Look out for the symptoms shown in this leaflet. Meningitis and septicaemia can be hard to recognise in the early stages because the first symptoms are just like many mild childhood illnesses.

The red flag symptoms shown inside this leaflet are often the next to appear – in an unwell child, these are a sign of early septicaemia.

A child with the most common form of meningitis or septicaemia will usually get ill quickly and get worse fast, so check your unwell toddler often, including during the night.

It is important to look for a rash. Many things can cause a rash, such as allergies and viruses, but if you see the tell-tale marks of septicaemia, get medical help right away. However, with the less common forms of meningitis and septicaemia there may be no rash, so do not wait for a rash to appear if you are worried about an unwell child showing other symptoms.

For more in-depth information about anything in this leaflet, ring the Foundation’s Freephone 24 hour helpline:

Meningitis Research Foundation’s Freephone 24 hour helpline
080 8800 3344 (UK)
1800 41 33 44 (Republic of Ireland)

or visit our website www.meningitis.org

For more information call Meningitis Research Foundation’s Freephone 24 hour helpline
080 8800 3344 (UK)
1800 41 33 44 (Republic of Ireland)

For information about vaccines, go to www.immunisation.nhs.uk (in the UK) or www.immunisation.ie (in the Republic of Ireland)

Spot Meningitis Symptoms - life saving information available by text in the UK, simply text MRF to 82088.
This text will be a standard rate text. MRF will not charge you for the video but data charges from your operator will apply.

Our vision is a world free from meningitis and septicaemia. That’s why we fund vital scientific research into the prevention, detection and treatment of the diseases.

We raise awareness of the symptoms and the need for urgent medical help by campaigns and leaflets like these, and provide resources for health professionals. We also offer written and audio information in 22 languages, details of which are on our website. Information is provided free of charge. We also support people affected by meningitis and septicaemia through our Freephone 24 hour helpline and other support services.

If you would like to help in the fight against meningitis and septicaemia, please call your local office. Thank you.

Meningitis Research Foundation:
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Tel 01454 281811

28 Alva Street Edinburgh
EH2 4PY
Tel 0131 510 2345
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Know the Symptoms

Meningitis and septicaemia can be hard to recognise at first. Symptoms can appear in any order, but the first symptoms are usually:

- Fever and/or vomiting
- Severe headache
- Limb/joint/muscle pain
- Cold hands and feet/shivering
- Pale or mottled skin
- Breathing fast/breathlessness
- Rash (purplish on the body)
- Stiff neck
- Dislikes of bright lights
- Very sleepy/vacant/difficult to wake
- Confused/delirious
- Seizures (fits) may also be seen

Other symptoms in toddlers and babies:

- Refusing to eat/feeding
- Incontinent, not wanting to be held/touched
- A stiff body with jerky movements, or floppy, unable to stand up

Babies and tiny tots may also have:

- A tense or bulging soft spot on the head (fontanelle)
- A high pitched or moaning cry

What should I do if I am worried about my toddler?

Trust your instincts. If you think your toddler has meningitis or septicaemia get medical help immediately. You could show the doctor, nurse or paramedic this leaflet and tell them you’re worried it might be meningitis or septicaemia.

Tumbler Test

If your toddler is ill and gets a rash, do the ‘Tumbler Test’. Check for spots over the whole body.

- If a glass tumbler is pressed firmly against a septicaemic rash, the marks will not fade. You will be able to see the marks through the glass.

IF THIS HAPPENS GET MEDICAL HELP IMMEDIATELY.

Remember, a very ill child needs medical help even if there are only a few spots, a rash that fades or no rash at all.

Freefone 24 hour helpline

080 8800 3344 (UK)
1800 41 33 44 (Republic of Ireland)

Meningitis and septicaemia can kill in hours.

Meningitis is swelling of the lining around the brain and spinal cord; septicaemia is blood poisoning caused by the same germs that cause meningitis.

There are many forms of meningitis and septicaemia. Some forms are more common than others.

What is the risk to my child?

Children under five are most at risk of meningitis and septicaemia. Fortunately, most children have natural resistance and vaccines give excellent protection against some forms. To find out more about vaccines contact your health visitor or GP surgery, or call Meningitis Research Foundation’s Freefone 24 hour helpline.

But remember, we don’t have vaccines to protect against all forms.

That’s why it’s vital to know the symptoms and know what to do if you suspect your toddler has meningitis or septicaemia.