Meningitis can affect anyone

Knowing the signs and symptoms can save lives
Meningitis is inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. It can strike quickly and kill within hours - its impact can last a lifetime. Many different organisms can cause meningitis but the most common are viruses and bacteria.

**Viral meningitis** can make people very ill but is rarely life-threatening. Most people fully recover, but sufferers can be left with after-effects such as headaches, tiredness and memory loss.

**Bacterial meningitis** can kill, so urgent medical attention is essential. Most people make a good recovery, but many are left with debilitating after-effects such as deafness, epilepsy, and brain damage.

Despite vaccines being available for some types of meningitis, each year in the UK there are about 2,500 cases of bacterial meningitis and an estimated 5,000 cases of viral meningitis.

**Meningococcal septicaemia** – meningococcal bacteria are the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the UK. They can cause both meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning), which people often have together. It is important to be aware of all signs and symptoms.

**The rash** – one sign of septicaemia is spots or a rash that do not fade under pressure when the side of a clear drinking glass is pressed firmly against the skin.

- Spots/rash may fade at first, keep checking
- If someone’s condition gets worse do **not wait for a rash**, it can appear late or not at all
- A fever with spots/rash that do not fade under pressure is a medical emergency
- The spots/rash are more difficult to see on darker skin, check paler areas
Signs and symptoms

Meningitis and septicaemia can be difficult to spot. Early symptoms such as fever, headache, nausea, and muscle pain can easily be mistaken for common illnesses like flu, so be aware of all signs and symptoms – they can appear in any order and some may not appear at all.

Do not wait for a rash, it can appear late or not at all.

Someone with meningitis or septicaemia can get a lot worse very quickly. Keep checking them.

If you suspect meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help immediately. You can:

- Call NHS Direct/NHS 24 or your GP
- Go to your nearest accident and emergency department
- Dial 999 for an ambulance

Describe the symptoms and say you think it could be meningitis or septicaemia.

Early diagnosis can be difficult. If you have had advice and are still worried, get medical help again.

Trust your instincts – get medical help immediately.
Common signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia

**Babies and Toddlers**
- Fever, cold hands & feet
- Refusing food & vomiting
- Fretful, dislike being handled
- Drowsy, flappy, unresponsive
- Rapid breathing or grunting

**Children and Adults**
- Fever, cold hands & feet
- Vomiting
- Drowsy, difficult to wake
- Confusion & irritability
- Severe muscle pain

**Meningitis**
- Pale, blotchy skin. Spots/rash seen Classic Test

**Septicaemia**
- Unusual cry or moaning
- Tense, bulging fontanelle
- Neck stiffness, dislike bright lights

**Caution**
- Convulsion/seizure

Knowing the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia saves lives.
Make sure you know what to look for. Download our free app at:
www.meningitisapp.co.uk
“I started to get flu-like symptoms, which got progressively worse. Alarm bells started to ring so I checked my Meningitis Trust symptoms card. I had six of the symptoms. I went to hospital straightaway. I’m so grateful I had the card. It saved my life”.

Helen Liley who contracted meningococcal disease whilst at university

Treatment
Bacterial meningitis and septicaemia need rapid medical treatment in hospital. If recognised and treated early, they are less likely to become life-threatening or cause serious after-effects.

Prevention
Vaccines are available to prevent some types of meningitis and have dramatically reduced the number of cases. It is important to know the signs and symptoms as vaccines are not available for all types.

After meningitis and septicaemia
After-effects are more common with bacterial meningitis. Families can be bereaved and survivors can be left with lifelong disabilities including deafness, brain damage, epilepsy, limb loss, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, memory loss and tiredness. Whatever the outcome, people's lives are changed forever.

Meningitis Trust – providing support for life
We provide the widest range of free professional services and community based support for people affected by meningitis in the UK. We also raise awareness of the disease and fund research into its long-term impact.

Our services help around 20,000 people each year, giving vital support to, and improving the lives of, those who are living with the life-changing impact of the disease every day.

Our support is for life and available to anyone affected by the disease; the individual, their family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and the community.
Support for life:

24-hour Freephone helpline – staffed by nurses, providing information and support whenever it is needed.

Home visits – an opportunity to talk to someone from the Trust in confidence and in the security of a person’s own home.

Art therapy – a therapeutic service which uses creativity to support children and young adults who have been affected by meningitis.

Counselling and bereavement support – safe, confidential services providing emotional support for anyone after meningitis.

Financial support grants – providing vital funding for unexpected costs following meningitis.

One-to-one support – putting people affected by meningitis in touch with a volunteer who has had a similar experience, for telephone or email support.

Family days – bringing families together to share their experiences of meningitis in a friendly and safe environment. Children can play together and parents can meet each other and talk to our staff.

Community support – our local teams are in the community to give help and support whenever it is needed.

Every year meningitis continues to devastate thousands of lives. The need for our work remains high. We rely on voluntary support and need your help to meet demand on our services. Visit our website or give us a call to find out how you can help.

helpline staffed by nurses
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Other service providers and mobile rates may vary.
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References for content of this leaflet are available on our website.