NEONATAL MENINGITIS

Some forms of bacterial meningitis particularly affect new-born babies. The most common are *E. coli* (properly called *Escherichia coli*) and group B streptococcus (*Streptococcus agalactiae*). Fatality rates can be as high as 20%, but these forms are rare. Many babies are exposed to the bacteria, but few become ill. The risks are higher for premature babies, or those born after a long or difficult labour.

*E. coli* - These bacteria are commonly found in the intestines. They can often cause urinary tract infections and diarrhoea. More rarely they cause meningitis in new-born babies.

*Streptococcal* - Severe illness caused by group B streptococcal bacteria can affect babies soon after birth. The bacteria are found naturally in the vagina of about one in five expectant mothers and may occasionally infect the baby before or during labour.

The illness can also occur later, up to two months after delivery, when infection may be from other people. (The bacteria can be found in the throats and intestines of people of all ages.)

TB MENINGITIS

TB meningitis is comparatively rare. People at particular risk include the elderly, those already ill and people from the Indian sub-continent, in whom TB infections are more frequent.

The infection starts somewhere else in the body, usually the lungs, and travels to the brain via the bloodstream. It develops much more slowly than other bacterial forms and can be difficult to diagnose.

FUNGAL MENINGITIS

Some fungi, especially *Cryptococcus*, can occasionally cause meningitis, but the disease is very rare. It usually only occurs in patients whose immune system has been severely depressed by disease (eg AIDS or leukaemia) or by drug therapy (eg following organ transplantation or treatment of cancer). Fungal meningitis may be slow in onset and difficult to diagnose and treat.