

Meningitis

While it is unlikely that Middlesex will suffer an outbreak, we feel that education is the best defence. This leaflet aims to give you the facts.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis means inflammation of the meninges (lining of the brain). It can be caused by bacteria or a virus.

Which sort of meningitis is the most serious?

Bacterial meningitis is the most serious type and requires urgent treatment. There are two types of bacterial meningitis: meningococcal and pneumococcal. The type that seems to have appeared in universities in the last few years is meningococcal meningitis. There are three strains of meningococcal meningitis - A, B and C group. Group B is the most common, responsible for over half the cases in the UK.

How can you tell if someone has meningitis?

Meningitis is not easy to spot at first because the symptoms are similar to those of flu. Recognising the symptoms early enough could mean the difference between life and death. The illness can develop very quickly and the person can become seriously ill in a few hours.

What are the symptoms?

You may have some of the following:

- Vomiting
- Very high temperature
- Violent or severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- Drowsiness
- Painful joints
- Fits

I understand there is sometimes a rash. When does this occur?

Some bacteria that cause meningitis also can cause septicaemia (blood poisoning). Septicaemia is associated with the meningococcal form of meningitis and can develop very quickly. A rash appears under the skin as a cluster of tiny blood spots. If this is not treated the spots get rapidly bigger looking like fresh bruises with bleeding under the skin. The spots or bruises **DO NOT** turn white when pressed. This is a very serious sign; medical help

should be sought immediately if someone has this rash.

How would I catch meningitis?

The germs that cause the disease are very common and are carried in the back of the nose and throat. They spread between people via coughing, sneezing and intimate kissing. People carry these germs naturally for weeks or months without becoming ill, in fact carrying the germs can help to make you more immune to meningitis. Occasionally the bacteria overcome the body's defences and cause meningitis.

How can I protect myself against this disease?

Knowing the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia is one of the best forms of defence against these infections. Both infections can be treated with powerful antibiotics. These need to be given very quickly which is why it is most important to know what to look for and to get medical help quickly if you are concerned. A meningococcal group C vaccine is available for all under 25's and anyone going to university for the first time. If you have not had this you should talk to your doctor about the possibility of being immunised. It is most important to remember though that this does not protect you against meningitis group B.

You can find out more information about Meningitis at www.meningitis-trust.org

NOTE: Make sure you register with your local GP. www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/GP/LocationSearch/4

Any questions?

Contact the Middlesex University Student Welfare Advice Team on **020 8411 3008** or email: welfare@mdx.ac.uk

You can access some of our other Welfare Advice Guide information leaflets at:

<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/welfare-guides>

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