

### **What is meningococemia?**

Meningococemia is a sudden infection of the bloodstream and blood vessels. Meningococemia may also be called meningococcal blood poisoning or meningococemia bacteremia.

### **What causes meningococemia?**

Meningococemia is caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*.

### **How is meningococemia spread?**

*Neisseria meningitidis* can live in the upper respiratory tract without causing any visible signs of illness. But the bacteria can be triggered by some event, causing it to become aggressive, therefore resulting in a case of meningococemia. The bacteria are spread to others who are in close proximity to the infected individual, through respiratory and throat secretions. Close proximity is one to three feet for 30 or more minutes. It is not as contagious as the common cold or the flu.

### **What are the signs and symptoms?**

There may be very few symptoms at first. When symptoms are present, they may include:

- fever
- a spotty red or purple rash
- irritability
- anxiety

Additional symptoms such as these may develop later:

- person looks sick
- level of consciousness can change
- shock
- bleeding under the skin
- blood clots

### **How do you know if someone has meningococemia?**

A medical diagnosis is made by using one or more blood tests and possibly a skin biopsy.

### **How is meningococemia treated?**

A person with meningococemia will most likely be admitted to a hospital's intensive care unit. Treatment may include IV fluids and antibiotics, breathing support, medications for blood pressure, blood clotting or platelets, and wound care for skin with blood clots. Isolation of the person will occur for the first 24 hours to avoid spreading the bacteria to others. Prognosis is generally good if treatment is received early.

### **Should close contacts be treated?**

Yes. Prophylaxis (preventive antibiotics) will be offered to family members and others.

**Can meningococemia be prevented?**

The MPSV4 and MCV4 (Menactra®) vaccines can help prevent four types of bacterial meningitis. The MCV4 vaccine is recommended for young people at their regular preadolescent medical checkup (ages 11-12). This vaccine is also recommended for a person entering high school if he has not had it previously. College freshmen who will be living in dormitories should also get the vaccine.

For more information, call UNCG Student Health Services at 334-5340.

*Fact sheet courtesy of Guilford County Department of Public Health*