

EXPOSURE TO MENINGOCOCCAL INFECTION

- **What is meningococcal infection and how is it spread?**

Meningococcal infection is a bacterial infection caused by Neisseria meningitidis. It usually causes only a nose and throat infection but may also cause meningitis and sepsis that may be fatal. Asymptomatic colonization of the upper respiratory tract (a “carrier”) is frequent and provides the focus from which the organism is spread. Transmission is from person to person through droplets and discharge from the nose and throat of the infected persons, more often from carriers than cases. Meningococcal cases occur most often in children younger than 5 years of age; adults more often are carriers.

- **What is considered to be an exposure to meningococcal infection?**

A person is considered to be exposed if there is direct contact with droplets and discharge from the nose and throat of an infected person, especially oral secretions at a time when a mask is not worn. A person is infectious and should be isolated until he/she has received appropriate antibiotics for 24 hours.

- **What should I do if I am exposed?**

If you are exposed to someone with meningococcal infection, you should be evaluated to see if you need antibiotics to prevent you from becoming a carrier and spreading the germ to others.

- **What are these antibiotics and who needs them?**

Antibiotics are recommended for household contacts and for other persons who have had intimate or close exposure (i.e., kissing, sharing food or beverages, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, intubation, or suctioning). There are several options for adults with meningococcal exposures: antibiotics will be chosen based on the exposed person’s medical history and the current CDC guidelines. If needed, antibiotics should be given as soon as possible after exposure, preferably within 24 hours.

- **What is the incubation period of this infection?**

The incubation period (the time between exposure to infection and the appearance of the first symptom) is from 1 to 10 days, most commonly less than 4 days.

- **What if my exposure occurs at work?**

In the event of an exposure within the Medical Center, Infection Control will notify the VOHC (Vanderbilt Occupational Health Clinic, Room 640 Medical Arts Building, phone 936-0955) of the faculty/staff members who have been exposed. The VOHC will then contact the faculty/staff members to discuss antibiotics. Your manager will need to complete a Tennessee First Report of Work Injury and forward this to the Office of Risk Management (Room 610 Oxford House, phone 936-0660). You should keep your receipts for any medical treatment that you receive as a result of this exposure and submit them to Risk Management for possible reimbursement.