

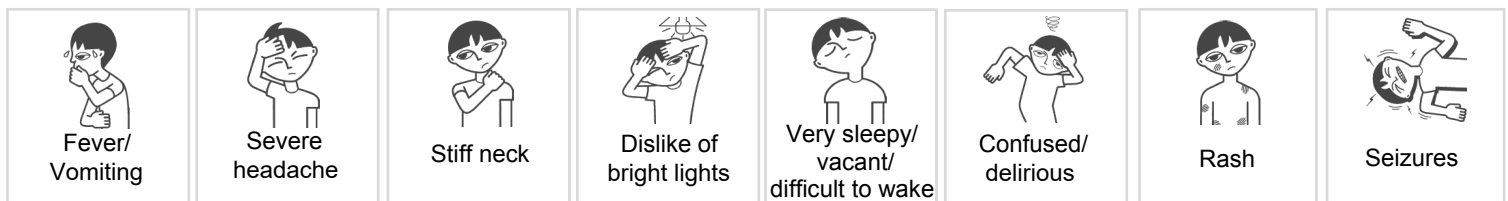
Meningitis, septicaemia and meningococcal disease

Symptoms of meningitis, septicaemia and meningococcal disease can occur in any order.
Not everyone gets all the symptoms.

What is meningitis?

- Meningitis is an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord caused by viruses or bacteria:
 - ⇒ Viral meningitis is usually milder than bacterial meningitis. Most people recover within 5 to 14 days without treatment.
 - ⇒ Bacterial meningitis is less common than viral meningitis but more serious, and needs urgent treatment.
- Meningitis can affect anyone, but is most common in babies, young children and teenagers.
- As early symptoms for both viral and bacterial meningitis can be similar, it is important to seek urgent medical help immediately. If symptoms are severe or worsening, go to the nearest Emergency Department or call 999.

Symptoms may include:

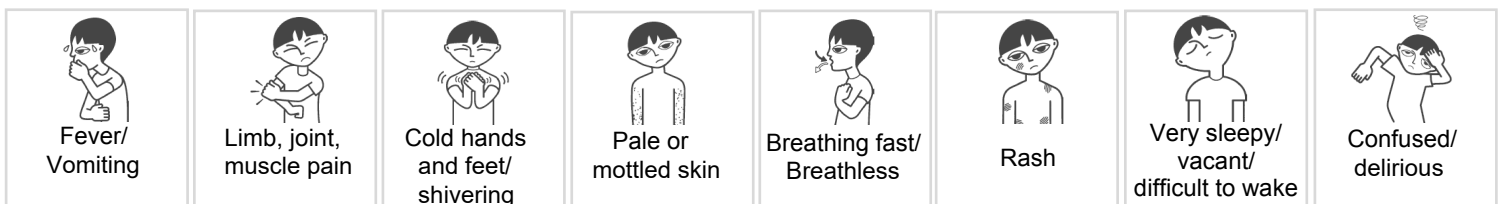


What is sepsis?

Sepsis (septicaemia or blood poisoning) is caused when bacteria enter the bloodstream releasing poisons which make you feel unwell and feverish. The bacteria damages the walls of blood vessels, causing blood to leak. This shows up on the skin as a rash which may start as tiny blood spots that look like red pin-prick type marks. These marks do not fade during a glass test and, if untreated, can spread to form bruises or blood blisters. The rash is not the only symptom of sepsis and in some cases, it may occur later, so do not wait for it to appear before getting medical help.



Symptoms of sepsis may include:



The Meningitis Baby Watch picture on page 2 of this leaflet has a full list of symptoms to look out for in babies

What is meningococcal disease and how does it spread?

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection caused by the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium. It can cause meningitis, sepsis, or both. It is most common from September to April. The infections are spread by people who are not sick but who are carrying the bacteria in the back of their nose or throat and through cough or saliva. It does not spread through water or food.

Treating Meningitis

With an early diagnosis, the urgent antibiotic treatment of bacterial meningitis and meningococcal disease increases the chance of a full recovery. Antibiotics are also given to close contacts. For viral meningitis, routine antibiotics are not given. Most people recover within 5 to 14 days without any medical treatment.

Vaccination and prevention of meningococcal disease:

The best way to prevent meningitis is to ensure your child is up to date with all their vaccines. Vaccines do not prevent every kind of meningitis, so if your child has symptoms that suggest meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help urgently.

There are different types of meningococcal bacteria, including groups A, B, C, W135 and Y. Vaccines for groups B and C are part of the primary childhood immunisation schedule in Ireland.

- ⇒ **Meningococcal B (MenB) Vaccine:** These bacteria are a common cause of meningitis in young children, especially before 12 months and up to the age of 2. Meningitis B vaccine is given to children at 2, 4 and 12 months of age.
- ⇒ **Meningococcal C (MenC Vaccine):** This vaccine is offered at 13 months.
- ⇒ **MenACWY Vaccine:** This vaccine protects against 4 types of bacteria that can cause Meningitis. These are meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y. Children will be offered this vaccine in the first year of secondary school.

Meningitis Baby Watch: Is your baby getting worse fast? Babies can get ill very quickly, so check often:

High temperature – in babies under 3 months, it can be normal or low

Very sleepy or staring expression or too sleepy to wake up

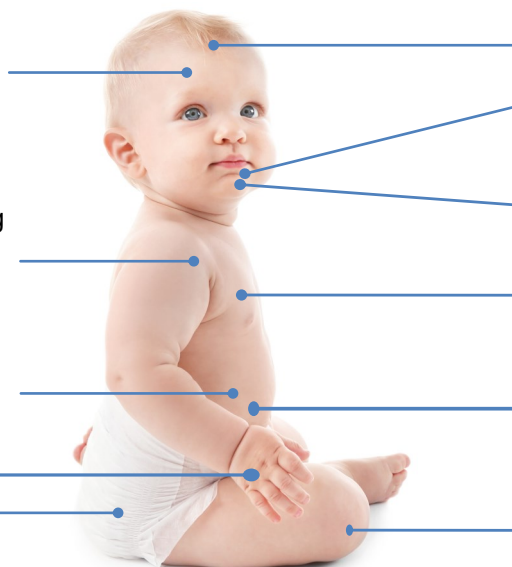
Blotchy skin, getting paler or turning blue

Extreme shivering

'Pin prick' rash or marks or purple bruises anywhere on the body

Cold hands and feet

Diarrhoea



Tense or bulging soft spot

Vomiting or refusing to feed
Unusual grunting sounds

Irritable when picked up, high pitched, moaning or odd cry

Floppy or unusually stiff body with jerky movements

A stiff body with jerky movements, or floppy and lifeless

Pain or irritability from muscle aches or severe limb or joint pain

Not every baby gets all these symptoms and symptoms can appear in any order.
If you feel "something is wrong", **get medical help quickly.**



The National Maternity Hospital, Infection Control Department, 2026