

HIV/AIDS and meningitis

Who we are

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Overview

Meningitis is a serious infection of the brain and spinal column which can affect anyone. A virus, bacteria or fungi may cause it. People diagnosed with HIV and AIDS have a higher risk of contracting meningitis, especially when their CD4 count is very low.

Cryptococcal meningitis

A fungus causes cryptococcal meningitis. This type of meningitis is very dangerous to HIV-positive people. Most people have been exposed to fungus that causes this infection at some time, but HIV-positive people have a greater risk of becoming infected because their bodies cannot fight it.

Early diagnosis and treatment of meningitis is essential to prevent permanent brain damage. The longer it takes for the infected person to be treated, the greater the risk of seizures (fits) and permanent damage to the brain and nerves.

Look out for the following signs

Symptoms usually appear quickly and may include:

- Fever and chills (feeling hot and cold)
- Change in mental status
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to light



- Severe headache
- Stiff neck.

Other symptoms that can occur include:

- Agitation (restlessness)
- Decreased consciousness
- Poor eating or irritability in children
- Rapid breathing.

As it is very often not possible to identify which type of meningitis you have, you should obtain medical attention immediately if you have any of the above symptoms. Should you have cryptococcal meningitis, you are required to continue treatment until your immune system is strong enough to prevent the disease from coming back.

Your Healthcare Professional will discuss the continuation of treatment with you and let you know when it is time to stop. Never stop treatment on your own, even when you feel better, always speak to your Healthcare Professional.

How to prevent the spread of meningitis

Meningitis typically results from contagious infections. Common bacteria or viruses that may cause meningitis may be spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing eating and drinking utensils or a toothbrush. Your risk increases if you live or work with someone who has the disease.

The following steps may help prevent meningitis:

- **Wash your hands:** Careful hand washing is important to avoid exposure to infectious agents. Wash your hands before eating and after using the toilet, spending time in a crowded public place or touching animals. Wash both the front and back of each hand with soap and rinse thoroughly under running water.
- **Stay healthy:** Look after your immune system by getting enough rest, exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and wholegrains.
- **Cover your mouth:** When you need to cough or sneeze, be sure to cover your mouth and nose.

Vaccinations

Some forms of bacterial meningitis can be prevented. Ask your Healthcare Professional about available vaccinations.

Disclaimer

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Complaints process

You may lodge a complaint or query with Bankmed Medical Scheme directly on 0800 BANKMED (0800 226 5633) or address a complaint in writing directly to the Principal Officer. Should your complaint remain unresolved, you may lodge a formal dispute by following Bankmed Medical Scheme's internal disputes process.

Members, who wish to approach the Council for Medical Schemes for assistance, may do so in writing to: Council for Medical Schemes Complaints Unit, Block A, Eco Glades 2 Office Park, 420 Witch-Hazel Avenue, Eco Park, Centurion 0157 or via e-mail at complaints@medicalschemes.com. Customer Care Centre: 0861 123 267/website www.medicalschemes.com

