

A photograph of two young children sitting on a grassy field. The child on the left is wearing a red dress and holding a large blue stuffed animal. The child on the right is wearing a colorful striped shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting. In the top right corner, there is an orange circular logo with the text 'Meningitis now' in white.

**Meningitis  
now**

# Your short guide to meningitis

**Children and Adults**

# What is meningitis?

Meningitis can affect anyone, it can strike quickly and kill within hours - its impact can last a lifetime.

Meningitis is the inflammation of the membranes that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord.

It can be caused by many different organisms, including bacteria and viruses.

People most at risk:

- Everybody carries a very small risk, but certain age groups are more susceptible
- The under-fives are the most at risk group, particularly the under ones
- Teenagers and young adults are the second most at risk group, then the over 55s

# Signs and symptoms

Knowing the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia, remaining vigilant and getting medical help quickly can save lives. Meningitis and septicaemia often happen together. Be aware of all the signs and symptoms.



Fever, cold hands and feet



Vomiting



Drowsy, difficult to wake



Confusion and irritability



Severe muscle pain



Pale/blotchy skin, spots/rash  
See glass test



Severe headache



Stiff neck



Dislike bright lights



Convulsions/seizures

## Early symptoms can include:

Fever, headache, vomiting, diarrhoea, muscle pain, stomach cramps, fever with cold hands and feet.

Someone with meningitis or septicaemia can get a lot worse very quickly. Keep checking them.

**Trust your instincts -  
get medical help immediately**

# Septicaemia

Some bacteria can cause meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). People with septicaemia may develop a rash of tiny red 'pin pricks' which can develop into purple bruising.

**THIS RASH DOES NOT FADE UNDER PRESSURE.  
DO THE GLASS TEST.**



Press the side of a clear glass firmly against the skin.

Spots/rash may fade at first.

Keep checking!

- Fever with spots/rash that do not fade under pressure is a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**
- **DO NOT WAIT FOR A RASH.** If someone is ill and getting worse, get medical help immediately
- **ON DARK SKIN**, the spots/rash can be more difficult to see. Do not wait for a rash. Be aware of all the signs and symptoms.

# Be fully informed

The information in this download is your simple introduction to meningitis. To fully understand the disease, its impact and how Meningitis Now is working to change lives affected by the disease, visit our website. Here are ten of the most useful links:

- Meningitis signs and symptoms: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/meningitis-explained/signs-and-symptoms/>
- Glass test: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/meningitis-explained/signs-and-symptoms/glass-test/>
- Types and causes: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/meningitis-explained/what-is-meningitis/types-and-causes/>
- After meningitis: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/meningitis-explained/after-meningitis/>
- MenB vaccine information: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/how-we-help/campaigns/beat-it-now/faqs-on-meningitis-b-vaccine/>
- Meningitis research: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/how-we-help/research/>
- Meningitis stories: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/support-us/news-centre/meningitis-stories/>
- Email update sign-up: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/support-us/news-centre/e-news-sign-up/>
- Support our work financially: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/support-us/donate/>
- Volunteering opportunities: <https://www.meningitisnow.org/support-us/volunteer-us/>

# Our helpline team is here for you

We know that facing meningitis can feel like a lonely place. With our helpline, you are not on your own. Call our specially trained staff to talk.

Contact our helpline on **0808 80 10 388**.

Alternatively, email us at **helpline@meningitisnow.org**

## Worried about meningitis?

Our helpline cannot diagnose or give medical advice. If you suspect someone has meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help immediately.

Call NHS 111 / NHS Direct (Wales) or your GP

## In an emergency you can:

- Go to your nearest accident and emergency department
- Or dial **999** for an ambulance



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