

Meningitis in babies and children under five



Babies, toddlers and young children under five are the most at-risk group for meningitis.

Meningitis can strike quickly and kill within hours. Make sure you know the signs and symptoms and seek urgent medical help if you are concerned.

As babies and toddlers cannot tell you how they are feeling, it can be easy to miss early signs and symptoms of meningitis. Check the [signs and symptoms](#).

Why are the under-5s at risk?

Babies and young children are particularly vulnerable to meningitis as they cannot easily fight infection because their immune system is not yet fully developed.

The most common causes of meningitis are bacteria and viruses.

Viral meningitis is rarely life-threatening, but can still make babies and young children very unwell. Most children will make a good recovery, but recovery can be slow.

Bacterial meningitis can be fatal and needs rapid admission to hospital and urgent medical treatment. Whilst most children will make a good recovery, around 10% will die and some will be left with lifelong disabilities.

Find out more about the [after-effects](#) of meningitis and septicaemia.

Some bacteria that cause meningitis can also cause septicaemia (blood poisoning). The rash associated with meningitis is actually caused by septicaemia. You should never wait for a rash, it can be a late sign or may not appear at all. Learn more about the rash and [glass test](#).

Preventing meningitis

Vaccines are the only way to prevent serious diseases like meningitis.

Several vaccines to prevent meningitis are routinely offered to babies and young children as part of the UK immunisation schedule. However, there isn't a vaccine to prevent all types.

See more information on our [vaccines page](#).





Know the signs and symptoms

Without vaccines for all types of meningitis, remaining vigilant is vital; we have **free lifesaving resources**.

- Request our credit-card sized signs and symptoms card to keep in your purse or wallet. Call our Helpline on 0808 80 10 388 to get yours
- **Download our free symptoms app**

Concerned about meningitis?

If you think your child has meningitis or septicaemia, get medical help immediately.

- Trust your instincts – you know your child best
- Describe the symptoms and say you think it could be meningitis or septicaemia
- If you have had medical advice and are still worried, get medical help again

Contact our helpline

Call our helpline 0808 80 10 388
or email helpline@meningitisnow.org



Meningitis Now

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