

ABOUT MENINGITIS

Parent information

You may have seen recent news about a meningitis outbreak in Kent. While this may have caused concern, health authorities have confirmed that the risk of further spread is low.

This brochure provides information to help you understand meningitis and keep your child safe.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an **infection of the protective membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord**, known as the meninges.

Meningitis can be caused by:

- Viruses, more common and usually less severe
- Bacteria, rarer but more serious

The bacteria that can cause meningitis are very common and often live harmlessly in the nose and throat without causing any illness.

Most people who carry these bacteria never become unwell.

Meningitis is usually spread through close contact with someone who is carrying the bacteria or virus, even if they don't have any symptoms. It is much less common to catch it from someone who is already ill with meningitis.

Meningitis often develops quickly and may initially resemble common childhood viruses like the flu or winter bugs. Children can deteriorate rapidly, so vigilance, early recognition and rapid action are essential.

Good to know

Confirmed cases of meningitis have **fallen by more than 145%** between 1999 and 2025, according to the UK Health Security Agency.

Most people who carry meningitis bacteria never become unwell, but infants, children, and young adults are most at risk.

Recognising early symptoms of meningitis

Symptoms can appear in any order, and not every child will have all of them.

- Fever
- Headache
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Very cold hands and feet
- Joint and muscle pain
- Pale, blotchy or mottled skin

Some children may seem “not themselves” and appear unusually tired, confused, or difficult to rouse. Younger children may struggle to describe what they are feeling.



When should I seek medical care?

If your child develops any of the below symptoms, follow NHS guidance and seek urgent medical help.

- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- A rash that doesn't fade when pressed with a glass
- A severe headache that doesn't improve or worsens
- Sudden onset of high fever
- Difficulty walking
- Difficulty breathing
- Extreme sleepiness and difficulty waking
- Confusion or delirium
- Seizures (fits)

Follow NHS guidance if you suspect meningitis

- ⚠ If you suspect your child has symptoms of meningitis, call 999 or go to A&E straight away.

Early treatment can be life-saving.

