

Intravenous antibiotics (IVAbs) for bacterial meningitis

Information for patients, parents and guardians

This factsheet contains advice for parents and carers of children who are going home on intravenous antibiotics for bacterial meningitis.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the protective membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord (meninges). It can affect any age group, but we see it most commonly in babies, young children and teenagers.

Your child was probably very unwell when you first brought them to hospital. They are now well enough to go home but need to complete their course of intravenous (into the bloodstream) antibiotics. You will need to look out for certain symptoms at home which we have explained below.

Causes

Meningitis can be caused by bacterial or viral infections. In the case of your child, we think that the cause was likely to be a bacterial infection. It is hard to say how your child will have caught the infection.

People can carry bacteria in their nose and throats but aren't necessarily ill with it.

Whether or not people are ill, they can then spread these bacteria by sneezing, coughing, kissing or sharing household objects. Most children don't tend to get unwell when they are carrying these bacteria but unfortunately a small number do.

Treatment

All children with suspected bacterial meningitis will be started on intravenous (into the bloodstream) antibiotics to treat the common causes of meningitis until we have more information from their test results. Your child will usually have had blood tests and a lumbar puncture. We test these samples to see if there was a specific bacteria causing the meningitis. We don't always get an answer, but if we do this helps us to decide which antibiotic we need to use and for how long.

Most children will be able to come home for part of their treatment course. These children would come into hospital daily for their antibiotics to be given or a community nurse would come out to give them at home.

Complications during treatment:

Once your child is on treatment for meningitis and is well enough to go home, they are likely to recover well.

Occasionally children may have complications of meningitis while they are being treated. It is very important to look out for any of their original symptoms coming back.

Contact the hospital urgently if your child has any of these symptoms:

- Fever
- Fast heart beat
- Fast breathing
- Changes in behaviour, such as confusion or disorientation
- Drowsiness
- Seizures (fits)

Your child will need to come into hospital urgently and may need to have further investigations or procedures.

It is very important that your child is reviewed by medical staff if they show any signs of failure to improve or deterioration.

If you are concerned that your child's condition is getting worse, contact the hospital urgently. Use the contact details on the information you were given when your child left hospital.

Call 999 for an ambulance if you have serious concerns for your child.

Useful links

You will no doubt have lots of other questions, so please ask the team looking after your child. The following organisations also have excellent information on their websites.

Meningitis now:
www.meningitisnow.org

Meningitis Research Foundation:
www.meningitis.org

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