Meningitis

Meningitis is a disease that is caused by an infection or inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis may develop in response to a number of causes, usually bacteria or viruses, but meningitis can also be caused by physical injury, cancer or certain drugs.

Most people with meningitis have a fever, severe headache and often a stiff neck. It is impossible to tell by symptoms alone if the meningitis is caused by a virus, a bacterium, or more rarely a fungus or parasite.

Viral meningitis is usually mild while bacterial meningitis is more severe and may need urgent treatment for the patient. One type of bacterial meningitis, known as meningococcal disease, requires treatment for the patient as well as medications for those in close contact with the patient.

Meningococcal vaccines are now available that help protect against all three different types of meningococcal disease that are most commonly seen in the United States.