Meningococcal disease is a rare but potentially serious infection caused by meningococcal bacteria. While meningococcal disease and its complications are uncommon, the consequences can be devastating.

Death occurs in about 1 out of 10 cases. Even with treatment, 20% of survivors can have long-term problems such as hearing loss, brain damage, or loss of arms or legs.

Five kinds of bacteria—known as Groups A, B, C, Y and W135—cause almost all cases of meningococcal disease. The disease spreads through close contact and sharing items like drinks, cutlery or toys. 1 in 5 healthy teens and adults are carriers of the bacteria. Carriers can sometimes spread the bacteria to others.

Parents and caregivers need to know the early signs and symptoms: severe headaches, neck stiffness, high fevers and a rash. If these occur, immediately seek medical attention.

Immunization is the most effective way to protect yourself and those around you from meningococcal disease. Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or local public health office to find out which vaccines are available in your area. For more information visit immunize.ca