

Amoebic Meningoencephalitis

Amoebic meningoencephalitis is an infection of the brain and the membranes covering the brain, which are called the meninges, caused by an amoeba (a microscopic single-celled organism).

Symptoms may include:

- > sore throat
- > headache and pain in the forehead
- > hallucinations
- > confusion
- > nausea and vomiting
- > high fever
- > neck stiffness and pain
- > disturbances of taste and smell
- > seizures.

The infection is diagnosed by examining fluid from around the spinal cord, as the amoeba causing the infection is visible under a microscope.

The amoeba that causes the infection occurs in shallow surface waters and incorrectly maintained swimming pools, hot tubs and spas, particularly in warm climates. Swimming in salt water has not been associated with this disease.

Infection occurs when infected water enters the nose. This can happen when diving, jumping or swimming in fresh water. The amoeba then invades the brain and meninges through the nose. This is a rare disease affecting mainly young, active people. It is almost always fatal.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

Usually 3 – 7 days.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Person-to-person spread does not occur.

Treatment

Swift diagnosis and treatment with specific antibiotics may be useful, but recoveries have been rare.

Control of spread

- > Do not dive, jump or swim in warm surface waters.
- > Hold your nose if you need to jump into water.
- > Wading pools should be emptied each day.
- > Swimming pools and spas should be kept clean and maintained correctly.
- > Keep sprinklers and hoses away from noses.

If you want more information about maintenance of private swimming pools and spas, contact your local Environmental Health Officer through your local council.