

Diphtheria

Pronounced dip-theer-ia

An acute, contagious infection caused by the bacteria *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*.

It can affect the tonsils, nose and/or skin. Symptoms include difficulty in breathing, high fever, damage the heart and central nervous system.

In serious cases, a poison produced by the bacteria causes an extra membrane (skin-like layer) to grow. It starts on the tonsils and can spread across the throat and into the upper parts of the lungs. Between 5-20% of people die from diphtheria (depending on their age)

The disease is highly contagious and spread by physical contact or breathing secretions (e.g. from coughs and sneezes) of those infected.

Tetanus

Pronounced tett-ah-nuss

An acute infectious disease caused by a specific poison produced by the bacteria *Clostridium tetani*. The poison or toxin causes the muscles of the patient to contract and seize up.

The bacteria live in the soil and often get into the body through a wound.

The disease often starts in the jaw and is sometimes called lockjaw. The muscle stiffness then spreads to the neck and back. The muscle spasms or contractions can be so strong they may tear muscles or even break bones.

Death usually occurs when muscles involved in breathing are paralysed.

Whooping Cough

An infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

Symptoms include runny nose, fever and frequent coughing spasms with a “whooping” breathing sound.

Coughing fits may be followed by vomiting due to the force of the cough. In severe cases this can lead to malnutrition. Otherwise the coughing fits gradually go away after 1-2 months.

The disease is spread by contact with airborne discharges from infected people (e.g. coughs and sneezes).

Tapeworm

Tapeworms are ribbon-shaped worms called Cestoda that live in the intestines of vertebrates including humans.

The worm attaches itself to the intestine with hooks or suckers and absorbs food. The worm can cause diarrhoea, weight loss and abdominal discomfort. Sometimes there are no symptoms (asymptomatic). If left untreated they can cause malnutrition or block the intestines.

Tapeworm can be caught from eating (usually raw) meat infected with tapeworm eggs or from infected people or animals like cats and dogs.

Some tapeworms have been known to live for 20 years and exceed 10 metres in length.

Meningitis

Pronounced men-in-jie-tus

Meningitis means the inflammation (swelling) of the meninges - part of the brain.

Most cases of meningitis are caused by viruses (e.g. enterovirus). Viral meningitis usually gets better by itself without any treatment.

Bacterial meningitis can be very serious and requires immediate treatment. Bacteria that cause meningitis include *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Neisseria meningitidis* and *Haemophilus influenzae*.

Symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a purple rash on the trunk and legs.

Untreated bacterial forms of meningitis can lead to coma or death. If the patient recovers there may be consequences such as permanent deafness.

Measles

An acute and highly contagious disease caused by a virus.

Symptoms include a cough, pink eyes and a rash of red circular spots which starts on the face and spreads over the body.

The disease is spread through contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person - either directly or through aerosol transmission (breathing in the virus from droplets in the air from an infected person's coughs or sneezes).

Complications are quite common and range from diarrhoea to pneumonia, severe brain damage and death.

Mumps

An acute, contagious disease caused by a virus.

The virus affects the salivary glands (found in front of and below the ear) and can also affect other parts of the body.

Symptoms include weakness, sore throat, tiredness and puffy cheeks (due to swollen salivary glands). People generally recover in about 2 weeks.

The disease is more serious in teenagers and adults when it can cause infertility and sometimes meningitis.

Mumps is spread through contact with saliva droplets or articles such as towels that may be contaminated with infected saliva.

Ringworm

A contagious disease not caused by a worm but by a fungus. It can affect the skin, hair or nails or humans and domestic animals.

Symptoms include ring-shaped, red, scaly, or blistering patches on the skin.

Ringworm is common in children and is spread by skin to skin contact as well as contact with contaminated items such as hairbrushes.

Malaria

A disease caused by the *Plasmodium* parasite that is transmitted by the bite of an infected *Anopheles* mosquito.

It is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions.

The parasite invades and destroys the red blood cells of the patient. Symptoms include attacks of chills and fever as the red blood cells are destroyed. In severe cases coma and death may occur.

Malaria kills up to 3 million people each year and is still the greatest single cause of debilitation and death in the world.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis is a general term meaning the inflammation (swelling) of the liver. It can be caused by viruses, medicines or toxins such as alcohol.

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus spread through food and water contaminated by faeces.

Symptoms are similar to those of flu but the eyes and the skin may become yellow (jaundice).