

## **Script – Print – No time to waste with bacterial meningitis**

Jeff Beck, known as one of the most talented and influential musicians of all time, recently died from bacterial meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. A two-time inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (first in 1992 as a member of the Yardbirds), Beck was 78.

According to Dr. Syed Zaidi, a family practice physician with OSF HealthCare, meningitis is anything that can penetrate the lining of your brain. It could affect someone who's had a major neurological surgery, a spinal tap, or sometimes even a common cold.

“You know how you sneeze or have a sinus infection? Anything in close vicinity to your brain, and it's unlikely but higher risk people who have other chronic comorbid conditions such as diabetics, heart failure, seizures, or IV drug use, which is a different kind of a risk factor, as well as HIV. Those who might have a weaker immune system such as children, or on the other spectrum, older in age are also at a higher risk.”

Each year, there are about 2.5 million cases of meningitis around the world. About 250,000 of those people die, including 20,000 in the United States. It's more common in developing or third world countries, Dr. Zaidi says, because the greatest risk is among people who live in close quarters, such as refugee camps, overcrowded homes or groups traveling on mission trips.

The symptoms vary, ranging from fever to headache and nausea. And while most people survive bacterial meningitis, many do suffer from permanent disabilities, such as brain damage, learning disabilities and hearing loss.

“You start to worry when you have fevers, chills, sweats, but the hallmark when we as clinicians get a little worried is when you have neck stiffness, difficulty moving your neck and confusion of cognitive impairment that comes on pretty abruptly,” says Dr. Zaidi. “One day, you're pretty normal and then all of a sudden, you're either slurring your speech or your memory's not right. Other people notice or you even pass out.”

Meningitis affects people of all ages, but young children seem to be at a greater risk. Newborn babies are at risk from Group B streptococcus, and young children are at higher risk from meningococcus, pneumococcus and Haemophilus influenza.

“In babies the bacteria that are commonly involved are a little bit different,” says Dr. Zaidi. “We typically think about the common ear infection in the child or newborns are higher risk for other types of bacteria known as Group B strep, in addition to listeria, which is another bacteria and that can be commonly acquired even through the birthing process. Not all women who are pregnant undergoing delivery will get screened for that. We have safeguards in place, but I think it's also important to educate the mother, the parents, and the family, about these risks and why we do these screenings.”

Bacterial meningitis is treated by antibiotics. Dr. Zaidi says timing is key, so recognizing symptoms as soon as possible is crucial. If you are experiencing a fever, neck stiffness or

confusion, it's time to seek immediate care. He adds that treatment is usually successful but as many as 20% of cases will have long-term complications including brain fog, cognitive delays or memory loss.

Dr. Zaidi stresses the best prevention is to stay current with your vaccinations, including those that protect against certain types of bacterial meningitis. There are vaccines for four types of bacteria that can cause meningitis. Talk to your doctor about vaccinations.

“I think bringing up what you're due for in terms of prevention of all conditions, whether it be cancers or infections. Vaccines are a part of that," he says. "I think the street goes both ways. Your doctor will bring it up too, but I think it's also very important for us as consumers of healthcare, to be wise to be able to ask those questions and engage in that conversation.”

For more information about vaccines, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).