

Meningococcal Disease: Protect Your Child

Public health authorities recommend that teenagers and college-bound students be immunized against a potentially fatal bacterial infection called meningococcal disease, a type of meningitis.

About Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection that can cause severe swelling of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or a serious blood infection (meningococemia). It strikes up to 3,000 Americans each year; nearly 30 percent of these cases are among teenagers and college students.

It is often misdiagnosed as something less serious because early symptoms are similar to common viral illnesses. Symptoms may include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, confusion, exhaustion and/or a rash. It can progress rapidly and can cause death or permanent disability within 48 hours of initial symptoms. It can develop and spread quickly throughout the body, so early diagnosis and treatment are very important. Even with immediate treatment, the disease can kill an otherwise healthy young person within hours of first symptoms. Of those who survive, up to 20 percent may endure permanent disabilities, including brain damage, deafness and limb amputations.

How does Meningococcal Spread

Meningococcal disease is spread through direct contact with respiratory and/or oral secretions from infected persons (for example, kissing or sharing drinking containers).

Meningococcal is Preventable through Vaccination

Up to 83 percent of all cases among teens and college students may potentially be prevented through immunization, which is the most effective way to prevent this disease. A meningococcal vaccine is available that protects against four out of five strains of bacterium that cause meningococcal disease in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical organizations recommends that all 11-12 years olds be vaccinated with meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) and receive a booster dose at age 16. Teens who received MCV4 for the first time at age 13-15 years will need a booster dose at 16-18 years of age. If a teenager missed getting the vaccine altogether, they should ask the doctor about getting it now, especially if they are about to move into a college dorm, military barracks, or other group settings.

Vaccine for Meningococcal Disease is available through your local Public Health Department and through your child's health care provider. To learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information, and public health resources call the Sheboygan County Division of Public Health at 920-459-4382 or 1-800-596-1919 or visit the following web sites.

- Sheboygan County Division of Public Health:
http://www.co.sheboygan.wi.us/html/d_hhs_pblchlth.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>