



FREEDOM AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

"Excellence Is Not Only Our Goal, It Is Our Tradition"

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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.

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). Meningococcal disease strikes up to 3,000 Americans each year; nearly 30 percent of these cases are among teenagers and college students.

Up to 83 percent of all cases among teens and college students may potentially be prevented through immunization, 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 should be vaccinated with meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4). A booster shot is recommended for teens at age 16 to continue providing protection when their risk for meningococcal disease is highest. Teens who received MCV4 for the first time at age 13 through 15 years will need a one-time booster dose at 16 through 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 or military barracks.

About Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease is often misdiagnosed as something less serious because early symptoms are similar to common viral illnesses. Symptoms of meningococcal disease may include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, confusion, exhaustion and/or a rash.

Teenagers and college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases every year. Meningococcal disease can be misdiagnosed as something less serious, because early symptoms like high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck, are similar to those of common viral illnesses. The disease can progress rapidly and can cause death or permanent disability within 48 hours of initial symptoms.

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

Lifestyle factors common among teenagers, college students and military personnel are believed to put them at increased risk of contracting meningococcal disease. These lifestyle factors include crowded living situations (for example, dormitories, sleep-away camps), active or passive smoking and irregular sleeping habits. Teens should avoid sharing eating utensils and drinking out of the same container, since infections may spread through this type of close contact.

To learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information, and public health resources visit the following web sites.

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Meningitis Foundation of America
- National Meningitis Association
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics

Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but very serious illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Even if treated quickly, meningococcal disease can cause long-term problems or be deadly. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent meningococcal disease.



Meningococcal Disease Can Lead to Meningitis or Bloodstream Infection

Meningococcal disease has two common outcomes – meningitis and bloodstream infection. These infections typically appear within 3 to 7 days after being exposed to the bacteria. Both of these conditions are very serious and can be deadly. In fatal cases, deaths can occur in as little as a few hours. People who recover from meningococcal disease can have lifelong complications, such as loss of limb(s), deafness, nervous system problems, or brain damage.

Meningitis

When someone has meningococcal meningitis, the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord becomes infected and swells. Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis include sudden onset of **fever**, **headache**, and **stiff neck**. There can be additional symptoms, such as:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Confusion

In babies, these symptoms can be difficult to notice or may not be there at all. Instead, a baby may appear slow or inactive, be irritable, vomit, or feed poorly.

Bloodstream Infection

When someone has a meningococcal bloodstream infection, the bacteria can enter the bloodstream and multiply, damaging the walls of the blood vessels and causing bleeding into the skin and organs. Symptoms may include:

- Fever or cold chills
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Cold hands and feet
- Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest, or belly (abdomen)
- Rapid breathing
- A dark purple rash

Meningococcal disease is a very serious illness that requires immediate medical care.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Immunization
and Respiratory Diseases

Certain People are at Increased Risk for Meningococcal Disease

Babies, teens, and young adults have higher rates of meningococcal disease than people of other ages do. Other factors, such as having certain medical conditions or traveling to certain countries, can increase your risk for getting this disease, no matter how old you are. **Talk to your healthcare professional to see if you or your child is at increased risk for meningococcal disease.**

Meningococcal Disease is Spread from Person to Person

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread by exchanging respiratory and throat secretions (saliva or spit) during close (for example, coughing or kissing) or lengthy contact, especially if living in the same household. Fortunately, these bacteria are much harder to spread than viruses that cause the common cold or the flu.

Meningococcal Disease is Very Serious but Treatable

Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria in the body). It is important that treatment be started as soon as possible. However, about 1 to 2 out of every 10 people who get meningococcal disease will die from the infection, even with quick and appropriate treatment. **If you think you or your child has meningococcal disease, seek medical care right away.**

Who Should Get Vaccinated Against Meningococcal Disease?

- All preteens and teens
- People 2 months old or older with certain medical conditions that affect the immune system
- Microbiologists who routinely work with *N. meningitidis*
- People 2 months old or older who are traveling to certain countries
- People 2 months old or older at risk because of an outbreak in their community

There are two types of vaccines that help protect against meningococcal disease. Most people who get a meningococcal vaccine do not have any serious problems with it. Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days, but serious reactions are also possible. **Talk to your healthcare professional about which vaccines you or your child may need.**

When Do Teenagers Need to be Vaccinated?

All preteens and teens should get vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

Preteens

All 11 to 12 year olds should receive one dose of a meningococcal conjugate vaccine that helps protect against four types (serogroups) of the bacteria: A, C, W, and Y.

Teens and Young Adults

Teens should receive a booster dose of a meningococcal conjugate vaccine when they are 16 years old to continue having protection during the years (16 through 23 years) when they are most at risk for getting meningococcal disease. Teens and young adults (16 through 23 year olds) may also be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine, preferably when they are between 16 and 18 years old.

