

Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal Disease is a rare but very serious disease. It is also called bacterial meningitis. This illness infects the blood and the brain. It can lead to brain damage, permanent disability and even death. Nationally, about 2,500 people will get meningococcal disease every year and about 100 will be college students. **Freshmen in dormitory settings** seem to have a slightly increased risk of meningococcal disease.

Common **symptoms** of meningitis include a stiff neck, headache, fever, sensitivity to light, sleepiness, confusion and seizures. Because these symptoms are typical of other illnesses, like flu or a migraine headache, it is sometimes misdiagnosed.

Meningococcal disease progresses very quickly. A person can be seriously ill only a few hours after they begin to feel sick. The disease can be successfully treated with antibiotics when they are started promptly. However, despite treatment, about one in ten people who get meningococcal meningitis will die. One in seven people will have permanent disability.

Preventing Meningococcal Disease

The bacteria which cause this disease go from person to person in respiratory droplets spread by coughing, sneezing or kissing. The disease does not go from person to person by casual contact or by breathing the same air. To go from one person to another requires close contact between people. The bacteria can live for only a few minutes outside the body. This means that books and desks are not a risk. Some people can carry this bacteria and not get sick. We don't completely understand why this happens.

You can **protect yourself** from meningococcal disease by practicing good hygiene, washing hands frequently, covering your mouth when you cough, and using tissues to wipe your nose. You can also protect yourself by not sharing items like cups, toothbrushes, bottles, cigarettes and lip balm.

The best protection against meningococcal disease is to get vaccinated. **Vaccination** can prevent more than half the cases of meningococcal disease every year.

Immunizations are available from your doctor or may be obtained at the Student Health Center.

Please make an immunization appointment by calling the Student Health Center, 831-459-2500.

Meningococcal vaccination at the Student Health Center will be billed to the student's account.

Your insurance may reimburse you.

Meningococcal Vaccination

This disease is caused by a number of strains of a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. The meningococcal vaccine protects against 4 of the 5 strains of bacteria which cause meningococcal disease. These 4 strains cause 70% of the cases of meningococcal disease in the United States. The vaccine can prevent most but not all cases of the disease.

The CDC recommends that young people receive two immunizations to protect them from bacterial meningitis. The first shot should be given at age 11 or 12 with a booster shot at age 16. The CDC recommends a booster shot because the vaccine seems to be effective for only about 5 years. For young people who receive their first vaccination at or after age 16, no booster shot is necessary. For young people who received their first meningococcal vaccine more than 5 years ago, the CDC recommends they receive a booster prior to coming to college. For specific situations, please contact your primary care provider.

