

Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease, commonly known as bacterial meningitis, is a potentially fatal infection that can occur among teenagers and college students. While meningococcal disease is rare and difficult to contract, it is very serious. There is now a vaccine that may help to prevent this infection.

Meningococcal bacteria can potentially be transmitted through close contact with an infected person through direct contact with respiratory and/or oral secretions from an infected person (for example, through sharing drinking containers or kissing). 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.

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 recommend routine meningococcal immunization for adolescents during the preadolescent doctor's visit (11- to 12-year-olds), adolescents at high school entry (15-year-olds) if they have not previously been immunized, and for college freshmen living in dormitories. Please contact your child's health care provider to help you decide if your child should receive this vaccination.

For more information, please feel free to contact the school nurse, Linda Rasmussen, directly at 262-210-6186 or visit the following websites to learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information, and public health resources.

- Wisconsin Department of Health Services communicable disease fact sheet (<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/factsheets/Meningococcal.htm>)
- A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Meningitis Fact Sheet (www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pdf/mengcdcfact.pdf)
- Local health dept. (www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/LocalHealth)
- American Academy of Family Physicians, www.aafp.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org
- Meningitis Foundation of America, www.musa.org
- National Meningitis Association, www.nmaus.org