

What is

# Meningococcal Disease?

**M**eningococcal disease is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. The two most common forms of meningococcal disease are **meningitis** (bacterial infection of the fluid and covering of the spinal cord and brain) and **meningococemia** (an infection of the bloodstream). Meningitis can also be caused by other bacteria and viruses.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

A diagnosis is commonly made by growing the bacteria from infected spinal fluid or blood. Identifying the bacteria is important for selecting the best antibiotics, but it is most important to start treatment early.

## How Many People Get the Disease?

Meningococcal disease is rare. An estimated 1,400 to 2,800 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. (about one case for every 100,000 people), with 200 to 400 of them in California. Of the 16 million U.S. college students, about 100 get meningococcal disease each year.

## Who Is Likely to Get It?

College students are *less* likely to get meningococcal disease than other people their age (18-23 years old). However, college freshmen living in student housing are more likely to get the disease than college and university students as a whole. Also, living with a smoker increases the chance for getting the disease.

## How Serious Is It?

Even if treated, 10-14% of people who get meningococcal disease will die from it. Of the survivors 11-19% lose their arms or legs, become deaf or brain damaged, or suffer other complications.



## How Are Meningococcal Bacteria Spread?

The bacteria are spread from person to person in secretions from the nose and throat. An infected person can pass it on by activities such as kissing, sharing cigarettes, lipstick, lip balm, and drink containers, including soda cans and water bottles. The bacteria can live outside the body for only a few minutes; if the germs contaminate a desk or book, they soon die and won't infect a person who touches it later. Overall, 5-10% of the U.S. population has the meningococcal bacteria in their throat, but only a few of them get sick. No one knows why some people get sick and others don't.

## How Can I Protect Myself?

- ✓ *Don't share items that have touched someone else's mouth, such as cups, bottles, cigarettes, lip balm, and eating utensils.*
- ✓ *Don't smoke.*
- ✓ *Get the meningococcal conjugate vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends it for freshmen living in student housing.*

## How Effective Are the Vaccines?

The meningococcal conjugate vaccine became available in 2005 and is more effective than the earlier meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine. Both vaccines work well (protecting about 90% of people) against four groups of *N. meningitidis* bacteria, but do not protect against one other common group. The meningococcal conjugate vaccine is expected to give protection that lasts at least several years. It should also help to prevent the disease from spreading from person to person. Ask your doctor about the benefits and risks of this vaccine.

# Off to College?



## What you should know about *meningococcal disease:*

- Meningococcal (me-nin-je-kok-ul) disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria that can infect the blood or areas around the brain and spinal cord. Infection can lead to brain damage, disability, and rapid death.
- Meningitis is the most common form of meningococcal disease. Common **symptoms of meningitis** include stiff neck, headache, and high fever.
- College freshmen, particularly those who live in student housing, are more likely to get the disease. About 100 cases occur on U.S. college campuses each year resulting in 5-15 deaths.
- Meningococcal vaccine can protect against four of the five most common groups of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease.

Before you start college, make sure you are up-to-date on all your immunizations: measles, mumps, rubella; tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis; varicella; and hepatitis B.

Get the meningococcal vaccine if you will be living on-campus in student housing.

### Students in On-Campus Housing:

I have reviewed both sides of this information flyer and...

I **intend** to receive meningococcal vaccine.

I **do not** intend to receive meningococcal vaccine.

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Date

**Return signed form to the Housing and Residential Education office.**

*Look for more information:*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

American College Health Association:

[www.acha.org/info\\_resources](http://www.acha.org/info_resources)

Ask your health care provider or Student Health Services!