

Meningococcal Disease (Meningitis) Fact Sheet

New York State requires that students acknowledge that they understand the disease risks and don't wish to be immunized at this time.

What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) caused by the meningococcus germ.

Who gets Meningitis?

Anyone can get Meningitis, but it is more common in infants and children. For some adolescents, such as first-year college students living in dormitories, there is an increased risk of Meningitis. Every year in the United States, approximately 2,500 people are infected and 300 die from the disease. Other persons at increased risk include household contacts of a person known to have had this disease, immunocompromised people, and people traveling to parts of the world where meningococcal meningitis is prevalent.

How is the meningococcus germ spread?

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

High fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash are symptoms of Meningitis. The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days. Among people who develop Meningitis, 10 to 15 percent die in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, kidney failure, loss of arms or legs, or chronic nervous system problems can occur.

What is the treatment for Meningitis?

Antibiotics, such as penicillin G or ceftriaxone, can be used to treat people with Meningitis.

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?

In February 2005, the CDC recommended a new vaccine, known as Menactra™, for use to prevent Meningitis. The previous version of this vaccine, Menomune™, was first available in the United States in 1985. Both vaccines are 85-100 percent effective in preventing the four kinds of the meningococcus germ (types A, C, Y, W-135). These four types cause about 70 percent of the disease in the United States. Because the vaccine does not include type B, which accounts for about one-third of cases in adolescents, it does not prevent all cases of Meningitis.

Is the vaccine safe? Are there adverse side effects to the vaccine?

Both vaccines are currently available and both are safe and effective vaccines. However, both vaccines may cause mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to two days.

Who should get the meningococcal vaccine?

The vaccine is recommended for all adolescents entering middle school (11-12 years old) and high school (15 years old), and all first-year college students living in dormitories. Also at increased risk are people with terminal complement deficiencies or asplenia, some laboratory workers, and travelers to endemic areas of the world. However, the vaccine will benefit all teenagers and young adults in the United States.

What is the duration of protection from the vaccine?

Menomune™, the older vaccine, requires booster doses every three to five years. Although research is still pending, the new vaccine, Menactra™, will probably not require booster doses. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100 percent of all susceptible individuals.

How do I get more information about Meningitis and vaccination?

Contact your family physician or your student health service. Additional information is also available on the Web sites of the New York State Department of Health, www.health.state.ny.us; the American College Health Association, www.acha.org; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/ncid/dbmd/diseaseinfo.

I have read, or have had explained to me, information regarding meningococcal disease. I understand the risk of not receiving the vaccine. I have decided that I (my daughter/son/ward) will not obtain immunization against meningococcal disease at this time.

Signature: _____ Printed Name: _____ Date: _____
of student (or parent/guardian of student under age 18)