

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS
Information for Students and Parents

If you have any questions, please contact your private physician or your local county health department or the Health & Wellness Services at Maryville University 314-529-9520. email: nurspam@maryville.edu or check out http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm for Centers for Disease Control information

What is meningococcal meningitis and meningococemia?

Meningococcal meningitis is a bacterial infection that causes inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. In college aged students it is most often caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitides*. Meningococemia occurs when the bacteria enters the bloodstream. This can lead to kidney and heart failure, and like meningococcal meningitis, can result in severe disability or death (20% of patients with meningococemia die from the infection).

What are the symptoms?

High fever, headache and stiff neck are the common symptoms of anyone over the age of 2 years. The symptoms can develop over several hours or may take 1 – 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, photophobia (discomfort looking into bright lights), confusion, sleepiness and rash. As the disease progresses, seizures may occur.

How is it spread?

The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e. coughing, kissing). The bacteria that cause meningitis are not as contagious as the common cold or the flu and they are not spread by casual contact of breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. Outbreaks are most often seen in the late winter and early spring. The bacteria that cause meningitis can be spread to people who have prolonged contact with a patient with meningitis. People in the same household or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a roommate or intimate friend) would be considered at increased risk for acquiring the infection and should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting bacterial meningitis. Students who are considered a close contact of someone diagnosed with meningitis and at risk for developing the disease can obtain the prescription for the medication through their private physician or our consulting physician.

Can it be prevented?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has modified its guidelines suggesting that college students, especially freshmen who live in residence halls, know of the polysaccharide meningococcal vaccine that may prevent bacterial meningitis. In two studies, this group was found to be at modestly increased risk of developing meningococcal disease relative to other persons their age. The currently available vaccine protects against some types (serogroups) of the bacterium *Neisseria meningitides*. The recommended dose is one vaccination. It may decrease the risk of disease caused by *N. meningitides* serogroups A, C, Y, and W-135. However, vaccination will not totally eliminate risk of the disease because the vaccine does not protect against serotype B and because, although it is highly effective against serotypes C and Y, it is not 100% protective against these serogroups. In 1998-99, serogroups C and Y caused about 70% of the cases among college students. The vaccine protection lasts for about 3 years.

How common is meningococcal meningitis?

Interestingly between 1 – 10% of the population carry the disease in their nose and throat harmlessly and do not contract the disease. The annual rate of illness is about 1-3 persons per 100,000 or 2,500 Americans per year, leading to death in approximately 10 to 15 percent of cases. On college campuses it is estimated that 100 to 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur with death resulting in 5 to 15 of the students with illness. While meningococcal disease overall remains relatively rare, the number of outbreaks has been on the rise in recent years.

How can one reduce the risk of contracting communicable disease?

Maximize your body's immune response by eating a balanced diet, getting adequate sleep and enjoying regular exercise. Avoid cigarettes and cigarette smoke and excessive use of alcohol. Wash hands frequently and never share drinks, cigarettes, eating utensils or other personal items. Report any illness of severe headache, fever or stiff neck immediately to your health care provider or go to the emergency room.

Where to get the meningitis vaccine or other vaccines.

- Your private physician
- Our consulting physician, Dr. Steven Willey located across the street from Maryville at St. Luke's cost about \$80.00
- St. Louis County Department of Health (\$65.00) or your own local health department.
- St. Louis County Department of Health:

South county: Lindbergh & Gravois	314-842-1300
J.C. Murphy: Helen Ave. at Airport & Hanley Road	314-522-6410