**Meningococcal Disease**

Don’t Wait. Vaccinate.

Meningococcal disease is a rare but sometimes deadly disease, also known as bacterial meningitis, that strikes adolescents and young adults.

The disease spreads quickly and within hours of the first symptoms can cause organ failure, brain damage, amputation of limbs or death.

Parents and their children should learn more about meningococcal disease and prevention. Vaccination can prevent most cases of the disease.

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**Talk to Your Doctor About Meningococcal Vaccination**

Parents and their children are encouraged to learn more about meningococcal disease and to talk to a physician about immunization and other prevention approaches.

**National Meningitis Association**

The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is a nonprofit organization established in July 2002.

Its mission is to educate families, medical professionals and others about bacterial meningitis and prevention approaches to the disease.

For the most recent information about meningococcal disease and NMA, or to contact a member of NMA, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA (1-866-366-3662) or visit www.nmaus.org.

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**Meningitis:**

Possible to Prevent. Dangerous to Ignore.
Facts About Meningococcal Disease

- Adolescents and young adults have an increased incidence of meningococcal disease, accounting for nearly 15 percent of all U.S. cases. One out of seven cases among adolescents and young adults will result in death.
- The majority of meningococcal disease cases among adolescents and young adults are potentially vaccine-preventable.
- Each year, meningococcal disease strikes nearly 1,500 Americans and 11 percent of those infected will die.
- Up to 20 percent of survivors have long-term disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, loss of kidney function or limb amputations.
- The disease can take one of two forms: swelling of membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord (meningococcal meningitis), or the more deadly meningococcemia, an infection of the blood.
- Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called Neisseria meningitidis.

Adolescents and Young Adults at Increased Risk

While anyone can get the disease, certain lifestyle factors common among adolescents and young adults increase their risk. These include, but are not limited to, irregular sleep patterns and crowded living situations, such as sleep-away camps, dormitories and other student-style housing arrangements. Active and passive smoking and social situations where there is crowding may also put them at increased risk for the disease.

Consider Vaccination

Immunization can prevent the majority of meningococcal disease cases in adolescents and young adults:

- Vaccination offers the best protection against the disease.
- Vaccination protects against four of the five major strains of the bacteria responsible for meningococcal disease in the U.S. The majority of cases in adolescents and young adults are vaccine-preventable.
- As with all vaccines, there may be minor reactions (pain and redness at the injection site or a mild fever).

Be Alert: Early Flu-Like Symptoms

Meningococcal disease is often misdiagnosed because its early signs are much like those of the flu or migraines. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. Later, after the disease has taken hold, a rash may appear. If any of these symptoms are present and are unusually sudden and severe, call a physician. Don’t wait.

How Meningitis Is Spread

Meningococcal disease is contagious. The disease is transmitted through the exchange of respiratory droplets such as coughing or sneezing, or through direct contact with an infected person (e.g., kissing). Adolescents and young adults can reduce their risk by being vaccinated. Most cases occur in late winter to early spring.

Immunization Information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination for all 11-12 year olds, with a booster dose at age 16. For those who receive the first dose at 13 through 15 years of age, a booster is recommended at 16 through 18. CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) suggests that adolescents receive the vaccine less than five years before starting college. Others who wish to be immunized against the disease should speak to their health care provider. Vaccination offers the best protection against the disease.

Find Out More

For more information about meningococcal disease and immunization, visit the following websites:

- National Meningitis Association
  www.nmaus.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  www.cdc.gov
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
  www.nfid.org

For medical advice about meningococcal immunization, consult your physician, college health service or local public health department.