

DID YOU KNOW?

- Meningitis strikes about 3,000 Americans each year and claims as many as 300 lives.
- Between 100 and 125 cases occur on college campuses every year.
- 5 to 15 college students die each year as a result.
- Cases among teenagers and young adults have more than doubled since 1991.
- The frequency of outbreaks has risen at U.S. colleges and universities during the 1990s.

WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection. It can occur in two forms –as either meningococcal meningitis, an inflammation that affects the brain and spinal cord, or as meningococcemia, the presence of bacteria in the blood. Permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, limb amputation, kidney failure, or death can result from the infection.

WHAT CAUSES MENINGITIS?

This infectious disease is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in older children and young adults in the U.S.

EARLY SYMPTOMS OF MENINGITIS

√ high fever	√ severe headache	√ nausea
√ rash	√ neck stiffness	√ sensitivity to light
√ vomiting	√ lethargy	

- Meningitis usually peaks in late winter and early spring, overlapping flu season; and symptoms can easily be mistaken for the flu.
- Because the infection progresses quickly, students should seek medical care immediately if two or more of these symptoms occur at one time.
- If untreated, meningitis can lead to shock and death within hours of the first symptoms.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR MENINGITIS?

Meningitis can strike at any age; however, certain groups have a greater risk for contracting the disease:

- College students, particularly freshmen, who live in campus residence halls.
- Anyone in close contact with a known case.
- Anyone with an upper respiratory infection with a compromised immune system.
- Anyone traveling to endemic areas of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

HOW IS MENINGITIS TRANSMITTED?

- Meningitis bacteria are transmitted through air droplets and direct contact with persons already infected with the disease.
- Direct contact also occurs with shared items, such as cigarettes or drinking glasses, or through intimate contact such as kissing.

IS THERE A VACCINE TO HELP PREVENT MENINGITIS?

- A safe, effective vaccine is available. The new conjugate vaccine is available.
- The vaccine is 85 to 100% effective in preventing four kinds of bacteria (serogroups A, C, Y, W-135) that cause about 70% of disease in the U.S. It is not effective against serogroup B.
- The vaccine is safe, with mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to 2 days.
- After vaccination, immunity develops within 7 to 10 days and remains effective for approximately 3 to 5 years. (Conjugate estimated at 8 to 10 years.) As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100% of all susceptible individuals.

IS VACCINATION RECOMMENDED FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS?

- Certain college students, particularly freshmen who live or plan to live in dormitories or residence halls, have a 6-fold increased risk of disease.
- The American College Health Association (ACHA) has adopted the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which states that college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories and residence halls, be immunized. They further indicate that the conjugate vaccine is preferred.
- Other undergraduate students wishing to reduce their risk of meningitis can choose to be vaccinated.

URI Health Services will have vaccine available in September. For Rhode Island residents (those paying in-state tuition) 18 years old or younger the vaccine is provided at no cost by the State Health Department; those 19 and over and most non-residents will be required to pay our cost for the vaccine. The student needs to call 874-4751 and ask for a meningitis vaccination appointment.

Additional information regarding meningitis and college students is available at the following web sites:

www.nmaus.org
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm
www.acha.org/meningitis