



Meningococcal Meningitis Disease Information and FAQs

- **What is meningococcal meningitis?**

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord).

- **Who gets meningococcal disease?**

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children. For some college students, such as freshmen living in dormitories, there is an increased risk of meningococcal disease. Between 100 and 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses every year in the United States; between 5 and 15 students die each year as a result of infection. Other persons at increased risk include certain immunocompromised people and household contacts of a person known to have had this disease and people traveling to parts of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

For more information see the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/high-risk/college.html>

- **How is the meningococcus germ spread?**

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person, for example sharing drinking bottles or cups - utensils. Many people carry this particular germ in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, a small percentage of people may develop serious symptoms.

- **What are the symptoms?**

High fevers, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. Among people who develop meningococcal disease, 10-15% 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.

- **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms may appear 2-10 days after exposure, but usually occur within 5 days.

- **What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?**

Antibiotic, such as Penicillin G or Ceftriaxone, can be used to treat people with meningococcal disease.

- **Should people who have been in contact with a person diagnosed with meningococcal meningitis be treated?**

Only people who have been in close contact (i.e. members of the same household, intimate contacts, students living in close contact in dormitories) need to be considered for preventive treatment. In those situations, people are usually advised to obtain a prescription for a special antibiotic (rifampin, ciprofloxacin or ceftriaxone) from their physician. Casual contact that might occur in a regular classroom, office, or factory setting, is not usually significant enough to cause concern.

- **Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?**

Yes, safe and effective vaccines are available. The CDC recommends Menactra for college age groups. Menactra is 85% to 100% effective in preventing four kinds of bacteria (serogroups A, C, Y, W-135) that cause approximately 70% of the disease in the United States. 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 7-10 days and remains effective for approximately 10 years. An older vaccine, Menomune, which lasts 3-4 years, is still available. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100% of all susceptible individuals. The vaccine does not protect against meningitis B or viral 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.

- **What is the duration of protection from the vaccine?**

Menactra lasts at least ten years and will probably not require booster doses. Menomune requires a booster dose every 3-5 years.

- **Who should get the vaccine?**

The vaccine is recommended for all adolescents entering middle school (11-12 years of age) and high school (15 years of age) and all first-year college students living in dormitories. However, the vaccine will benefit all teenagers and young adults in the US. Also, at risk are people with certain complement deficiencies (patients with properdin deficiency) are also at risk, those who have no spleen, some laboratory workers, and travelers to endemic areas of the world. All incoming undergraduates have to provide proof of immunization against meningococcal meningitis. If you are over 21 and NOT living in a dorm, you may petition to be excluded from this requirement by completing the meningitis response form, which can be found at http://www.nyu.edu/shc/pdfs/meningitis_response.pdf .

- **Where do I send the Meningitis Response form?**

Return the form and any required documents to the NYU Student Health Center – or they can be dropped off at:

NYU Student Health Center
Immunization Record Services
726 Broadway, Suite 336
New York, NY 10003
(212) 443-1199

Or fax to: (212) 443-1198

- **Where can I get more information?**

Contact your family physician or visit the following web sites:

- New York State Department of Health
http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/viral_meningitis/fact_sheet.htm
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>
- American College Health Association
<http://www.acha.org/Topics/meningitis.cfm>

- **Are vaccines available through NYU Student Health Center?**

Yes, vaccines are available for a fee through Allergy, Immunology and Travel Medicine Services on the 3rd Floor of the SHC in Room 347 (212-443-1188). <http://www.nyu.edu/shc/medservices/allergy.immunology.travel.html>