

Meningococcal Meningitis Disease Information Sheet

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease (commonly referred to as meningitis) 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 freshman 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 college students die each year as a result of infection. Other persons at increased risk include household contacts of a person known to have had this disease, immuno-compromised persons, and people traveling to parts of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

How is the germ meningococcal spread?

The meningococcus germ is spread by/through the air via respiratory secretions such as coughing, sneezing, kissing , or sharing of personal items like utensils, cigarettes, and drinking glasses. Many people carry this particular germ without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

High fever headache, vomiting, stiff neck, and a rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. Meningitis is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to swelling of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, kidney failure, seizures, chronic nervous system problems, loss of limbs, and even death.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear 2 to 10 days after exposure, but usually within 5 days.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

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

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?

Yes, a safe and effective 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 the disease in the United States.

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

The vaccine is safe with mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to two days. A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions, but the risk of the meningococcal vaccine causing serious harm is small.

What is the duration of protection from the vaccine?

After vaccination, immunity develops within 7 to 10 days and remains effective for approximately 3 to 5 years. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect all susceptible individuals.

Where can I obtain the vaccine?

The College does not offer meningococcal vaccine services through the campus health service center. Students who would like to receive the vaccines should consult with their primary care physician or a traveler's clinic. The cost of the vaccine varies, but prices quoted have ranged from \$75 - \$100.

How do I get more information about meningococcal disease and vaccination?

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