



Facts About Meningococcal Disease and Immunization

What is meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease, also known as bacterial meningitis, is a rare but sometimes deadly infection that can strike adolescents and young adults. The disease strikes quickly and has devastating complications, including hearing loss, brain damage, limb amputations, loss of kidney function and, in some cases, death.

Who is at risk for meningococcal disease?

- Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for getting meningococcal disease. In fact, they account for nearly 15 percent of all cases of meningococcal disease reported in the U.S. Death rates are higher among adolescents and young adults compared with other age groups and approximately one in seven will die. The majority of meningococcal disease cases among adolescents and young adults may be prevented by vaccination.

Why are adolescents and young adults at risk for meningococcal disease?

- Certain lifestyle factors common among adolescents and young adults increase their risk. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Irregular sleep patterns
 - Crowded living situations, such as sleep-away camps, dormitories and other student-style housing arrangements
 - Active and passive smoking
 - Social situations where there is crowding

How is meningococcal disease 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).

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is often misdiagnosed as something less serious, as the symptoms often resemble those of the flu. Symptoms may include sudden high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. Some people also develop a rash. Since symptoms progress quickly, it is very important that medical attention is sought immediately.

Can meningococcal disease be prevented? How can adolescents and young adults reduce their risk of getting meningococcal disease?

- Yes. Immunization can reduce one's risk of contracting four of the five common strains of the disease, which account for the majority of cases in adolescents and young adults.
- Meningococcal conjugate vaccines are available for use among children, adolescents and adults two through 55 years of age.
- Immunization is the best method of prevention. However, maintaining a healthy lifestyle like getting plenty of rest and not coming into close contact with people who are sick can also help.

Are there government recommendations for meningococcal disease vaccination?

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal immunization for all adolescents 11-12 years old, with a booster dose at age 16. For adolescents who are first vaccinated between 13 and 15 years of age, a booster dose is recommended 5 years after the first dose through age 21.
- Meningococcal vaccination is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease, including college freshmen living in dormitories.

Where can I find more information?

- Following are additional resources that provide more information about meningococcal disease and prevention methods, including vaccination:
 - National Meningitis Association: www.nmaus.org
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

What is the National Meningitis Association?

- The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is a nonprofit organization founded by parents of children who have died or live with long-term effects from meningococcal disease.
- NMA's mission is to educate families, medical professionals and others about bacterial meningitis and prevention approaches to the disease.
- For more information about NMA and the organization's activities, or to contact a member of NMA, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA (1-866-366-3662) or visit www.nmaus.org.