

# Meningococcal Disease

Don't Wait.  
Vaccinate.

**M**eningococcal disease is a rare but sometimes deadly disease, often called meningitis, that strikes adolescents and young adults.

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

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

## 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 more information about NMA and its activities, or to contact a member of NMA, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA (1-866-366-3662) or visit [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).



**Meningitis:  
Possible to Prevent.  
Dangerous to Ignore.**



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## Facts About Meningococcal Disease

- Adolescents and young adults have an increased incidence of meningococcal disease, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases. One out of four cases among adolescents 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 3,000 Americans, and 10 to 12 percent of those infected will die.
- Up to 20 percent of survivors have long-term disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, 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 meningococemia, an infection of the blood.
- Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

## Adolescents, Young Adults at Increased Risk

Lifestyle factors common among adolescents and young adults seem to be linked to the disease. These include crowded living situations such as dormitories, boarding schools and sleep-away camps, going to bars, smoking, and irregular sleep habits.



## Consider Vaccination

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

- The meningococcal conjugate vaccine is expected to provide long-term immunity and decrease carriage of meningococcal bacteria among adolescents, preventing the spread of 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 often is 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

The disease is spread through air droplets and direct contact with someone who is infected. That includes coughing, kissing, and through close personal contact.

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 recommends meningococcal immunization (one shot) for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age.

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 Web sites:

- National Meningitis Association  
[www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)
- American Academy of Family Physicians  
[www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases  
[www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org)

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