



SAMPLE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

The below document contains questions commonly asked regarding meningococcal disease in adolescents and young adults. This document can be distributed to a variety of audiences, including parents and students, school officials and media.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease, (pronounced men-IN-jo-kok-ul), commonly known as meningitis, is a potentially fatal bacterial infection that strikes nearly 3,000 Americans each year. According to one study, as many as one out of four adolescents infected with the disease may die. Of those who survive, up to 20 percent endure long-term disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, kidney disease or limb amputations.

The disease is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* and is expressed as either meningococcal meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord, or meningococemia, an infection of the blood. In this document, references to meningococcal disease also apply to meningococemia.

Who is at risk for meningococcal disease?

Adolescents and young adults have an increased incidence of meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases annually.

Certain lifestyle factors, common among adolescents and young adults, appear to be linked to the disease. These factors include:

- Crowded living conditions (such as dormitories, boarding schools and sleep-away camps)
- Moving to a new residence
- Attending a new school or camp with students from geographically diverse areas
- Active or passive smoking
- Irregular sleeping patterns

What are the symptoms?

The disease is often misdiagnosed as something less serious because its early symptoms are similar to the flu. Symptoms may include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. Once the disease has had a chance to progress, a rash may appear.

If left untreated, often within hours of the first symptoms, meningococcal disease can progress rapidly and lead to shock and death or serious complications such as hearing loss, brain damage, kidney disease or limb amputations. Students are urged to seek immediate medical care if any of these symptoms come on unusually sudden or severe.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

This type of meningitis is transmitted through air droplets and direct contact with infected persons (e.g., coughing or kissing). It occurs most often in late winter and early spring.

Is there a vaccine to help prevent meningococcal disease?

A safe and effective vaccine is available to help protect against four of the major strains of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease in the United States. The majority of cases among adolescents are vaccine-preventable.

The FDA approved a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine for use among 11- to 55-year-olds, which is expected to provide long-term protection against the disease. This vaccine is safe and effective. Public health officials anticipate that children immunized at age 11 or 12 will be protected throughout the years when they are at increased risk for disease.

How effective is the vaccine?

The meningococcal vaccine protects against four of the major strains of bacteria that cause the disease. The majority of cases among adolescents and young adults are potentially vaccine-preventable.

Are there side effects to the vaccine?

As with all vaccines, there can be minor reactions, including pain and redness at the injection site, headache or fatigue. The vaccine is not recommended during pregnancy or if the individual has a compromised immune system or a history of Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS).

What are the current immunization recommendations?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal immunization for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age.

Where can I find more information?

Following are Web sites that provide more information about meningococcal disease and immunization:

- National Meningitis Association, www.nmaus.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, www.nfid.org

Or for more information about the vaccine, consult your physician or local public health department.

What is the National Meningitis Association (NMA)?

NMA is a nonprofit organization founded by parents whose children have either died or endure long-term disabilities 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.