

# Start Summer Protected:

## Facts About Meningococcal Meningitis and Immunization



### What is meningococcal meningitis?

- Meningococcal [Pronounced: MEN-IN-JOE-KOK-UL] meningitis is a bacterial infection that causes swelling of the tissues around the brain and spinal cord, called meningitis, or causes blood poisoning, called meningococemia [Pronounced: MEN-IN-JOE-KOK-SEE-ME-A].
- It is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in the U.S. among toddlers, adolescents and young adults and strikes nearly 3,000 Americans each year.
- If not treated quickly, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disability just hours after its first symptoms appear.

### Who is at risk for meningococcal meningitis?

- Anyone can get meningitis, but adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for the disease and account for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases.

### Why are adolescents and young adults at risk for meningococcal meningitis?

- Bringing large groups of adolescents together – especially from different geographic locations – can increase their risk of contracting meningococcal meningitis. Other lifestyle factors common among adolescents, such as sharing utensils, water bottles and other items that may transmit saliva, can also increase their risk of infection.

### How is meningococcal meningitis spread?

- Meningitis is spread person-to-person through air droplets and close contact, such as coughing, kissing and sharing utensils or water bottles.

### What are the symptoms of meningococcal meningitis?

- Meningitis is often misdiagnosed as something less serious, because early symptoms often resemble the flu or a cold. First symptoms may include headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, and confusion. After the disease progresses, a purplish rash may appear.

### How can adolescents and young adults reduce their risk of getting meningococcal meningitis?

- The majority of meningococcal meningitis cases among adolescents are potentially vaccine-preventable.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends meningococcal vaccination for all adolescents 11-18 years of age.
- Adolescents and young adults can also reduce their risk by not sharing certain items, such as utensils and beverages, and by maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

### Where can I find more information?

- For more information about meningococcal meningitis and prevention methods:
  - National Meningitis Association, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org) or 866-FONE-NMA (866-366-3662)
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)