



FACTS ABOUT MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE AND VACCINATION

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease, commonly referred to as bacterial meningitis or simply as meningitis, is a rare but sometimes deadly bacterial infection. The disease strikes quickly and has devastating complications, including hearing loss, brain damage, kidney damage or limb amputations.

10 to 15 percent of those who contract meningococcal disease die. Among those who survive, as many as 20 percent live with permanent disabilities. Vaccination offers the best protection against meningococcal disease.

Who is at risk for meningococcal disease?

Anyone at any age can get meningococcal disease, but some people have a higher risk for the disease. These include:

- Adolescents and young adults
- Infants less than one year old
- People living in crowded settings like college dorms or military barracks
- Those with persistent complement component deficiency or anatomic or functional asplenia
- People traveling to certain areas outside the U.S. such as the meningitis belt in Africa
- Laboratory personnel who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria
- Those who might have been exposed to meningococcal disease during an outbreak

How is meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal disease is contagious. It is spread through the exchange of respiratory secretions during close contact such as kissing or coughing on someone. Although meningococcal bacteria are very dangerous, they cannot live outside the body for very long. This means the infection is not as easily spread as a cold virus.

About one in ten people carry meningococcal bacteria in their nose or throat without showing any signs or symptoms of the disease. These people can unknowingly transmit the bacteria to others.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is often misdiagnosed since early symptoms often resemble those of other infections like flu. Symptoms may include sudden high fever, headache, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. Particularly worrisome symptoms and signs of the infection include a purplish rash, pain when looking at bright lights and a stiff neck. Since symptoms progress quickly, it is very important to seek medical attention immediately.

Can meningococcal disease be prevented?

Yes. Vaccination offers the best protection against the disease by protecting against the bacteria (*Neisseria meningitidis*) that cause meningococcal disease.

NMA believes that adolescents and young adults should be fully vaccinated against this disease with BOTH of the following vaccines:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a quadrivalent conjugate vaccine to all adolescents at age 11-12 with a booster at age 16.

- This vaccine protects against four strains (A, C, W and Y).
 - C and Y are two of three major strains that cause disease in the U.S.
- This is a “category A” recommendation, which means it is routinely recommended.
- Vaccines are now available to protect against serogroup B, the third major serogroup that causes disease in the U.S. Serogroup B accounts for one-third of U.S. cases.
 - CDC recommends this vaccine at age 16–23, with a preferred age of 16–18 years.
 - This is a “category B” recommendation, which means it is up to individuals and their doctors to decide if they should get the vaccine.

NMA continues to advocate for the broadest possible recommendations to protect all adolescents and young adults against serogroup B meningococcal disease since they are at higher risk for infection.

Meningococcal vaccines are available in the U.S. for people ages 6 weeks and older.

Others recommended for meningococcal vaccination include younger children and adults with certain medical conditions, travelers and military recruits. For the full list of persons recommended by the CDC for meningococcal vaccination, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/who-vaccinate.htm>.

Vaccination 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.

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: <http://www.nmaus.org>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://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 meningococcal disease 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.