



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.

Of those who contract meningococcal disease, 10 to 15 percent 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

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:

- Crowded living situations (such as dormitories, boarding schools and sleep-away camps)
- Attendance at a new school with students from geographically diverse areas
- Irregular sleeping patterns
- Active or passive smoking
- Social situations where there is crowding
- Moving to a new residence

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 as 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 that medical attention is sought immediately.

Can meningococcal disease be prevented?

Yes. Vaccination offers the best protection against the disease. Meningococcal vaccines are available in the U.S. for people 6 weeks of age and older.

Routinely recommended vaccines offer protection against four of five major strains of the bacteria (*Neisseria meningitidis*) that cause meningococcal disease: A, C, W and Y. **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends this vaccine to all adolescents at age 11-12 with a booster at age 16.**

CDC recommends permissive use of serogroup B meningococcal vaccination at ages 16-23, with a preferred age of 16 to 18 years. Older adolescents and young adults can decide, in collaboration with their healthcare professionals, to be vaccinated against the fifth major strain and it will be covered by private and public health insurance.

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

There are others recommended for meningococcal vaccination, including 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: 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 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 visit www.nmaus.org.