XAVIER UNIVERSITY McGrath  
Health and Wellness Center  

MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria. It is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2-18 years of age in the United States. Meningococcal bacterial can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or sepsis (an infection of the bloodstream). Symptoms of meningitis include stiff neck, headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, confusion and drowsiness. Symptoms of sepsis include fever, shock and coma. Death from sepsis can occur within 12 hours of the beginning of the illness. Meningococcal disease can be a rapid and overwhelming infectious disease. Every year about 2,600 people in the United States are infected with meningococcus. Ten to fifteen percent of these people die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, another 10 percent lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded or suffer seizures or strokes.

How do you catch a meningococcal infection? Usually meningococcal infection is acquired after intimate contact with an infected person. Intimate contact includes kissing, sharing toothbrushes or eating utensils or frequently eating or sleeping in the same dwelling as an infected individual.

Who is at risk? Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is most common in infants less than 1 year of age and in people with certain medical conditions. College freshmen, particularly those who live in dormitories, have a slightly increased risk of getting meningococcal disease. The risk for meningococcal disease among non-freshman college students is similar to that for the general population; however, the vaccine is safe and effective and therefore can be provided to non-freshmen undergraduates who want to reduce their risk for meningococcal disease.

What can be done to decrease risk? The meningococcal vaccine can prevent four types of meningococcal disease. These include two of the three most common types in the United States. Meningococcal vaccine cannot prevent all types of the disease, but it does help to protect people who might become sick if they don’t get the vaccine. The vaccine is available through a variety of settings including physician offices and university/college student health centers.

What about the vaccine? A vaccine, like any other medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as allergic reactions. People should not get meningococcal vaccine if they have ever had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine. Some people who get the vaccine may develop redness or pain where the shot was given, and a small percentage of people develop a fever. The risk of the meningococcal vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small. Getting meningococcal vaccine is safer than getting the disease. College students and their parents should discuss the timing, risks and benefits of vaccination with their health care providers.

What is the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP) recommendations?  
The ACIP recommends routine vaccination of persons with quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine at age 11 or 12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years. After a booster dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine, antibody titers are higher than after the first dose and are expected to protect adolescents through the period of increased risk through age 21 years. For adolescents who receive the first dose at age 13 through 15 years, a one-time booster dose should be administered, preferably at age 16 through 18 years, before the peak in increased risk. Persons who receive their first dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine at or after age 16 years do not need a booster dose. Routine vaccination of healthy persons who are not at increased risk for exposure to N. meningitides is not recommended after age 21 years.

Where can I get the vaccine? The meningococcal vaccine is a Xavier requirement.  
Most primary care providers can provide the meningococcal vaccine. The vaccine is also available at the McGrath Health and Wellness Center. We do not bill insurance companies directly but will provide you with the necessary paperwork for you to submit a claim to your own health insurance.

For more information about the meningococcal vaccine access the Vaccine Information Sheet at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web site: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/speec-grps/college.htm

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