

## The Center for Health and Counseling Services

### MENINGITIS ON CAMPUS

#### Know Your Risk Learn About Vaccination

Certain college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, a rare, but potentially fatal bacterial infection, commonly referred to as meningitis.

#### Did you know?

- **Meningococcal disease** is a bacterial infection that most often leads to meningitis or a condition called meningococcal septicemia, which is an infection of the blood.
- **Meningococcal disease is caused** by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis* that are spread person-to-person through the air (usually by sneezing or coughing), through direct contact with an infected person, such as oral contact with shared items like cigarettes or drinking glasses, or through intimate contact, such as kissing.
- **Meningococcal disease can lead to** death or permanent disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures, and/or limb amputation.

#### What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

- **Symptoms of meningococcal disease often resemble those of the flu or other mild illnesses with a fever**, making it sometimes difficult to diagnose. Symptoms may include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and confusion. If you notice these symptoms – in yourself, friends, or others – you should contact your college health service or local hospital.

#### How is meningococcal disease transmitted?

- **College students, particularly freshmen who live in residence halls, are more likely to acquire meningococcal disease** than the general college population, due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations, bar patronage, active or passive smoking, irregular sleep patterns, and sharing personal items.



### **How can meningococcal disease be prevented?**

- **Many cases of meningococcal disease can be prevented.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age and all first-year college students living in dormitories be vaccinated against meningococcal disease. The American College Health Association (ACHA) supports these recommendations and further states that all other college students under the age of 25 years who wish to reduce their risk for the disease may choose to be vaccinated.
- **Vaccination is safe and effective.** It protects against four of the five most common strains (or types) of bacteria that cause meningitis. Approximately 70 to 80 percent of cases in the college age group are caused by strains that are potentially vaccine-preventable. The most commonly reported adverse reactions among adolescents and adults in clinical studies were pain at the injection site, headache, and fatigue. These respond to simple measures (ibuprofen or acetaminophen) and resolve spontaneously within a few days.

**IMMUNIZATION UPDATE FALL 2010:** The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is now recommending a booster dose of MCV4 five years after the initial shot for adolescents and young adults.

### **For More Information**

To learn more about meningitis and immunization, visit The Center for Health and Counseling Services, Mother Teresa Hall-lower level, 815-836-5455, <http://www.lewisu.edu/student-services/health/index.htm>

You also can visit the websites of the American College Health Association, [www.acha.org/meningitis](http://www.acha.org/meningitis), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub\\_meningitis.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_meningitis.htm).