



## Meningococcal Meningitis Fact Sheet

**What is meningococcal disease?** Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) caused by the *Neisseria meningitidis* germ.

**Who gets meningococcal disease?** Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children, and those living in crowded conditions (such as college students). Other persons at increased risk include household contacts of those known to have the disease, immunocompromised people, and people traveling to parts of the world where the disease is common.

**How is the meningococcus germ spread?** It is spread by coming in contact with the nose or throat secretions of an infected person.

**What are the symptoms?** High fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. The symptoms may appear 2 to 10 days after exposure, but usually within 5 days. Among people who develop meningococcal disease, 10-15% die, in spite of treatment. Of those who live, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, kidney failure, loss of arms or legs, or chronic nervous system can occur.

**What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?** Antibiotics are the mainstay of treatment for the meningococcal disease.

**Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?** There are two types of meningococcal vaccines available in the US:

- Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (MPSV4)- marketed under the trade name Menomune.
  - Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) - produced by different companies under the names Menactra and Menveo.
- Each vaccine can prevent 2 of the 3 most common meningococcal strains in the US. While the shots do not prevent each vaccinated person from becoming ill, they do protect many people who might otherwise become sick or die.

**Who should get the meningococcal vaccine?** The vaccine is recommended for:

- All 11 to 18 years old
- All first year college students living in dormitories;
- People at increased risk of meningococcal disease ( persons with terminal complement deficiencies, asplenia, some laboratory workers, travelers to areas of the world where meningococcal illness is common).

**I had one meningitis vaccine. Do I need a booster dose?** MPSV4, the older the vaccine, requires a booster dose every 3-5 years. When MCV4 first arrived it was expected that boosters would not be needed; however, current data suggests that its immunity wanes in most adolescents after 5 years. A booster dose is now recommended for students headed to college if it has been more than 5 years since their last dose.

**Is the vaccine safe?** Vaccines, like any medicines, can cause serious problems like severe allergic reactions. The risk of the meningococcal vaccine causing serious harm or death is extremely small. A serious nervous system disorder called Guillain-Barre' Syndrome (or GBS) has been reported among some who received MCV4. This happens so rarely that it is currently not possible to tell if the vaccine might be a factor. Mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot is given, can occur in up to 50% of those vaccinated. If a problem like this occurs they usually last for 1 or 2 days. They are more common after MCV4 than after MPSV4. A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever.

**How do I get more information about meningococcal disease and vaccination?** Contact your medical provider or SUNY Potsdam's Student Health Service. There is also information available on the websites of the New York State Department of Health, <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/meningococcal/factsheet.htm>; and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>.

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