

RE: Important Meningitis Immunization Update

June 1, 2017

Dear Student:

Before your arrival in the fall, I encourage you to make sure that you are vaccinated against meningococcal disease, including meningitis. This is a potentially serious health hazard facing college students, particularly first-year students living in residence halls.

As a college student, you should be aware that, although the risk is very low, outbreaks of meningitis and blood infections due to the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* have occurred on college campuses in recent years. Studies from previous college outbreaks suggest that college students are more susceptible because they live and work in close proximity to each other in residence halls and classrooms. Lifestyle appears to be a risk factor as well, with exposure to active and passive smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and bar patronage all increasing the chance that one will contract meningitis from an infected individual.

Meningitis is a serious and potentially fatal disease that affects the brain and spinal cord and can lead to permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss and brain damage. Meningococcemia (blood infection) can lead to kidney and heart failure and may also result in severe disability and death.

There are, however, safe and effective vaccines that can provide protection against the more worrisome strains of meningococcal disease found on campus. Because outbreaks are clustered in time, and because onset of symptoms is extremely rapid, it makes sense for students to reduce their risk of meningococcal disease with meningitis vaccination before an outbreak occurs.

It is now a standard recommendation that all 11 to 12 year olds receive the quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine (MCV4), known as "Menactra" or "Menveo"; a booster dose should be given at age 16. For adolescents who receive the first dose between the age of 13 and 15, a booster between age 16 and 18 is recommended, just before the peak of increased risk. Adolescents who receive their first dose of the vaccine after age 16 do not need a booster dose.

Two new vaccines against a different form of meningitis, serogroup B *Neisseria*, were recently approved for high risk individuals. These vaccinations would be given in addition to the quadrivalent meningitis vaccination series.

We strongly suggest that you review and discuss your meningitis risk and vaccination status with your health care provider at the time of your college entrance medical history and physical exam. Ideally, the vaccination or booster would be done before coming to UNH, but we do have the quadrivalent vaccine available for a fee at Health Services.

Sincerely,

Peter Degnan, M.D.
Medical Director
UNH Health Services