



Meningitis and Meningococcal infection

There are two kinds of meningitis, each caused by a different type of organism:

Viral meningitis: this is the more common form of the disease. Viral meningitis is usually not as serious as bacterial meningitis, and patients usually get better with minimal treatment.

Bacterial meningitis: This form of the disease is often referred to as meningococcal meningitis. Because it can spread from person to person it has been known to cause outbreaks in specific areas such as college campuses, military recruits, and individuals with impaired immune systems. The remainder of this information is related to bacterial meningitis.

Bacterial meningitis can be very difficult to diagnose and treat because it often begins with symptoms that can be mistaken for flu or other respiratory infections. But unlike more common infections, meningococcal disease can get worse very rapidly, and kill a healthy young adult in 48 hours or less. The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease can cause meningitis, a severe swelling of the brain and spinal cord. It can also lead to sepsis, a life threatening blood infection.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease include a headache, fever, stiff neck, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and light sensitivity. Some people also develop a purplish black-red rash of small dots (petechiae), mainly on their arms and legs. Not everybody will develop all these symptoms. The symptoms appear 2 to 10 days after exposure, but usually within 5 days. From the time a person is infected until the germ is no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat, he or she may transmit the disease.

Although meningococcal disease is uncommon, the risk for this disease is higher in young people living on college campuses. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, college students living in dormitories have a 6-times greater chance of meningococcal disease than other college students. The exact reason for this is not known for sure. Anyone can be a carrier of the bacteria that causes the disease. Data does indicate that certain social behaviors, such as exposure to passive and active smoking, bar patronage and excessive alcohol consumption, may increase the risk for the disease.

The Meningococcal Vaccine helps to protect against four strains of the disease, including serogroups A, C, Y and W-135. It does not provide immunity to serogroup B. The vaccine is very safe and adverse reactions are mild and infrequent, consisting primarily of redness and pain at the site of the injection lasting up to two days. The duration of the vaccine is approximately three to five years. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100 percent of all susceptible individuals.

We highly encourage you to discuss the option of getting the vaccine with your family physician. You can also obtain additional information about the Meningococcal Vaccine on the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website at: http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vaccine/mening/mening_fs.htm or at the American College Health Association (ACHA) website at: http://www.acha.org/projects_programs/men.cfm.

Students interested in getting the meningitis vaccine should contact the Student Health Center at 351-2412 to make an appointment.

By clicking on this link you have acknowledged that you have received the required information and notification about meningococcal disease.