

Meningococcal Disease and Students: Commonly Asked Questions

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by infection with bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. These bacteria can infect the tissue (the “meninges”) that surrounds the brain and spinal cord and cause meningitis, or they may infect the blood or other organs of the body. In the US, about 1,000-1,200 people get meningococcal disease each year and 10-15% die despite receiving antibiotic treatment. Of those who survive, about 11-19% may lose limbs, become hard of hearing or deaf, have problems with their nervous system, including long term neurologic problems, or have seizures or strokes.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

These bacteria are passed from person-to-person through saliva (spit). You must be in close contact with an infected person’s saliva in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact includes activities such as kissing, sharing water bottles, sharing eating/drinking utensils or sharing cigarettes with someone who is infected; or being within 3-6 feet of someone who is infected and is coughing or sneezing.

Who is most at risk for getting meningococcal disease?

High-risk groups include anyone with a damaged spleen or whose spleen has been removed, those with persistent complement component deficiency (an inherited immune disorder), HIV infection, those traveling to countries where meningococcal disease is very common, microbiologists and people who may have been exposed to meningococcal disease during an outbreak. People who live in certain settings such as college freshmen living in dormitories and military recruits are also at greater risk of disease caused by some of the serotypes.

Are students at increased risk for meningococcal disease?

The risk of meningococcal disease starts to increase in adolescence and young adulthood. In this age group, the highest rates of disease are in those 15-24 years of age.

Is there a vaccine against meningococcal disease?

Yes, there are 3 different meningococcal vaccines. Quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra and Menveo) protects against 4 serotypes (A, C, W and Y) of meningococcal disease. Meningococcal serogroup B vaccine (Bexsero and Trumenba) protects against serogroup B meningococcal disease, for age 10 and older. Quadrivalent meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (Menomune) is recommended for people age 56 and older with certain high-risk conditions.

Should my child or adolescent receive meningococcal vaccine?

Different meningococcal vaccines are recommended for a range of age and risk groups. Quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine is recommended routinely for children 11-12 years of age, with a second dose at age 16. **MDPH strongly recommends two doses of quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine: a first dose at age 11-12 years, with a second dose at 16 years.** College freshmen and other newly enrolled college students living in dormitories who are not yet vaccinated are also recommended to receive meningococcal conjugate vaccine.

Meningococcal B vaccine is recommended for people over age 10 in certain relatively rare high risk groups. In addition, adolescents and young adults (16 through 23 years of age) **may** be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine, preferably at 16 through 18 years of age, to provide short term protection for most strains of serogroup B meningococcal disease. Talk with your doctor about which vaccines your child should receive.

Massachusetts law requires newly enrolled full-time students attending colleges and schools with grades 9-12, who will be living in a dormitory or other congregate housing, licensed or approved by the school or college, to receive a dose of quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine (A, C, W, Y) or sign a waiver declining vaccination. There is no requirement for meningococcal B vaccine for entry to school or college. More information about this requirement may be found in the MDPH document entitled “*Information about Meningococcal Disease and Vaccination and Waiver for Students at Residential Schools and Colleges.*”

How can I protect my child from getting meningococcal disease?

The best protection against meningococcal disease and many other infectious diseases is thorough and frequent handwashing, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette. Individuals should:

1. wash their hands often, especially after using the toilet and before eating or preparing food (hands should be washed with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel or rub may be used if hands are not visibly dirty);
2. cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue in a trash can; or if they don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve.
3. not share food, drinks or eating utensils with other people, especially if they are ill.

If your child is exposed to someone with meningococcal disease, antibiotics may be recommended to keep your child from getting sick. You can obtain more information about meningococcal disease or vaccination from your healthcare provider, your local board of health (listed in the phone book under government), or the MDPH Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800 or on the MDPH website at www.mass.gov/dph.

Updated Meningococcal Disease and Vaccination Requirements for College Students Beginning Fall of 2018



All newly enrolled full-time students 21 years of age and younger will be required to show documentation of a dose of MenACWY vaccine administered on or after their 16th birthday, regardless of housing status.

- All full-time students 21 years of age and younger must receive the Information and Waiver Form for Students, which will be revised to reflect the updated requirements for 2018, **AND have one of the following:**
 - documentation of a dose of MenACWY vaccine received on or after their 16th birthday **OR**
 - a medical or religious exemption for meningococcal vaccine **OR**
 - a signed meningococcal vaccine waiver.
- Meningococcal B vaccine does not fulfill the requirement for meningococcal vaccine.
- All supporting documents for meningococcal vaccine and information requirements for college students can found on our website:
<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/id/epidemiology/providers/public-health-cdc-meningitis-info.html>.

Summary of Current and Future Meningococcal Requirements for College Students

Current Requirements (in effect for the 2017-18 school year)	Future Requirements (in effect for the 2018-19 school year)
One dose MenACWY for all newly enrolled full-time residential students	One dose of MenACWY for newly enrolled full-time students 21 years of age or younger (<22 years of age) received on or after the 16 th birthday, regardless of housing status.