

Meningitis on Campus

Know Your Risk • Learn About Vaccination



Dear Parents & Students,

On behalf of Valparaiso University, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a rare, but potentially fatal, bacterial infection commonly referred to as *meningitis*, and a new immunization recommendation that may affect college-bound adolescents.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the American College Health Association (ACHA) have approved new recommendations that urge all first-year students living in residence halls to be immunized against meningococcal disease. The ACIP and ACHA recommendations further state that other college students under 25 years of age who wish to reduce their risk for the disease may choose to be vaccinated.

A reformulated meningococcal vaccine ("conjugate") is now available that has the potential to provide longer duration of protection against four of the five strains (or types) of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease – types A, C, Y, and W-135.

Due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations, bar patronage, active or passive smoking, irregular sleep patterns, and sharing of personal items, college students living in residence halls are more likely to acquire meningococcal disease than the general college population.

Meningococcal infection is contagious, and progresses very rapidly. It can easily be misdiagnosed as the flu, and, if not treated early, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disabilities. One in five of those who survive will suffer from long-term side effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures, or limb amputation.

For more information, please feel free to contact the Valparaiso University Health Center and/or consult your physician. You also can find information about the disease and immunization by visiting the ACHA website, www.acha.org/meningitis, and the CDC website, www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html.

MENINGITIS ON CAMPUS

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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, 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 and the American College Health Association recommend that all first-year students living in residence halls be vaccinated against meningococcal disease. 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.

For More Information

To learn more about meningitis and immunization, visit Valparaiso University Student Health Center, 55 University Drive, Suite 102, Valparaiso, IN 46383, (219) 464-5060, www.valpo.edu/healthcenter. You also can visit the websites of the American College Health Association, www.acha.org/meningitis, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_meningitis.htm.

Valparaiso University Health Center

Ph: 219.464.5060 | healthcenter@valpo.edu

Fax: 219.464.5410 | www.valpo.edu/health