

Meningococcal Disease Information

Q. What is meningococcal disease?

A. Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria. Meningococcal disease can cause an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or the blood. The bacteria can live in the membranes of the nose and throat, usually with no symptoms. In a small number of people, the bacteria pass to the blood, causing either a serious infection of the blood or meningitis.

Q. How is this germ spread?

A. The bacteria are spread from person to person by direct contact with an infected person's nose or throat secretions.

Q. What are the signs of being sick with this germ?

A. Illness often starts with a sudden fever, headache, stiff neck, a rash, and possibly nausea and vomiting. An infected person may be very sick within a few hours and should seek medical care immediately.

Q. Who is at highest risk for getting the disease?

A. Babies, children and young adults are most likely to get the disease, including middle school and high school students. While individual students may become infected, large outbreaks usually do not occur in school or workplace settings. People living in crowded places are at higher risk for infection.

Q. Can meningococcal disease be prevented?

A. Yes, the disease can be prevented by good hygiene. Cover nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing, throw used tissues away and wash hands often.

Q. What vaccines may prevent a child from getting this germ?

A. Two vaccines are available to prevent this infection:

Meningococcal Conjugate Vaccine (MCV4), which is *Menactra*

This vaccine is licensed in the U.S. for persons 11-55 years of age. It is likely that this vaccine or a similar vaccine will be licensed for younger age groups in the future. This vaccine is recommended for:

- Young adolescents at the pre-adolescent visit (11-12 years old)
- Adolescents at high school entry (about 15 years old)
- Groups that have a higher risk of meningococcal disease, such as students that will be college freshmen living in dormitories.

Meningococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine (MPSV4), which is *Menomune*

This vaccine is recommended for people who have an increased risk of disease due to certain medical conditions who are age 2-10 years and over 55 years. People at high risk need revaccination every 3-5 years.

For questions about meningococcal disease or vaccines to prevent meningococcal disease, please contact your physician or your local health department.

Additional information may be found at the following websites:

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/healthinfo/meningococcal%20disease.htm>

http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vaccine/mening/mening_fs.htm