

As the school nurse for Greensburg Community School Corporation, I am required by the state to inform you of Meningococcal Disease and Pertussis (Whooping Cough).

Meningococcal Disease is caused by a bacteria normally found in the nose and throat of 10-15% of healthy adults. Rarely, the bacteria can enter areas of the body where bacteria are normally not found and cause a severe, life-threatening infection. Examples of meningococcal disease include meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and septicemia (bloodstream infection). This is a very rare disease, reporting around 30 cases each year. It is spread by living in the same household or dormitory room, kissing on the lips, or sharing eating utensils, toothbrushes, or drinks from the same container. It is not spread by casual contact or by attending the same work or school setting. Young infants, students attending high school or college, and military recruits are more likely to get the disease. Anyone with a weakened immune system or living in a crowded dwelling is at a higher risk. Symptoms include sudden onset of fever, severe headache, stiff neck, drowsiness, confusion, skin rash, nausea, vomiting, and eyes sensitive to light. Meningococcal disease requires immediate medical attention.

Pertussis is a contagious respiratory infection that may cause severe coughing fits that can interfere with breathing. Pertussis can lead to pneumonia, seizures, and sometimes death. Most of these serious problems occur in infants who are younger than a year old. Indiana reported 271 cases in 2008 and 392 in 2009. Pertussis is spread by contact with nose or throat secretions from an infected person. This can happen when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Those who are not vaccinated, have not completed a full series of pertussis vaccine, or who have not received pertussis vaccine for several years are at increased risk for pertussis.

Both diseases may be prevented through proper vaccination. There are two types of vaccines that protect against 4 of the 5 common strains of Meningococcal Disease. One type is the MCV4 for use in people ages 9-55 years. A dose of MCV4 vaccine is recommended for adolescents at age 11-12 years old, with a booster dose at age 16. Indiana schools require that all 6th -11th grade students receive 1 dose of the MCV4, and a booster is now required as a 12th grader.

Children should have 5 doses of the diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP) vaccine before school entry, and adolescents and adults (ages 10 years and older) should also receive one dose of Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine to provide protection against pertussis. Indiana requires that students in grades 6-12 receive a single dose of Tdap.

For more information, you may contact your healthcare provider. You may also check the Centers for Diseases and Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov. You may also contact me with questions or needed information in regards to school immunization requirements.

Mindy Grunkemeyer, RN, BSN

Greensburg Community School Corporation, School Nurse

(812)663-8112 ext. 3003