

## Meningococcal Disease

According to Wisconsin State Statute 36.25(46), Dodgeand School District is required to inform you about the dangers of meningococcal disease, commonly known as bacterial meningitis, a rare but potentially fatal infection that can occur among teenagers and college students. While meningococcal disease is rare and difficult to contract, it is very serious. There is now a vaccine that may help to prevent this infection.

Meningococcal bacteria can potentially be transmitted through air droplets and by direct contact with an infected person (e.g., kissing, coughing). Due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations (sleep-away camps, dorms), sharing personal items (e.g., utensils, drinking glasses), active or passive cigarette smoking, and irregular sleep patterns, teenagers and college students are more likely to contract meningococcal disease than the general population. In fact, this age group accounts for nearly 30 percent of all cases in the U.S. every year.

Meningococcal disease can be misdiagnosed as something less serious because early symptoms like high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting, and stiff neck, are similar to those of common viral illnesses. The disease can progress rapidly and may result in death or permanent disability, including brain damage, organ failure, and loss of hearing, within 48 hours of initial symptoms. That is why it is so important for parents to be aware of the disease and consider immunization for their teenagers and college-bound children.

Up to 83 percent of all cases among teens and college students may potentially be prevented through immunization, the most effective way to prevent this disease. A meningococcal vaccine is available that protects against four out of five strains of bacterium that cause meningococcal disease in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical organizations recommend routine meningococcal immunization for adolescents during the preadolescent doctor's visit (11- to 12-year-olds), adolescents at high school entry (15-year-olds) if they have not previously been immunized, and for college freshmen living in dormitories. I suggest you contact your child's health care provider to help you decide if your child should receive this vaccination.

For more information about meningococcal disease and immunization, please contact Dodgeand's School Nurse at 920-386-4404 - extension 1012 or visit the following websites to learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information, and public health resources visit the following web sites.

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) – This CDC website includes the CDC recommendations and information on the meningococcal vaccine.
- [http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/Communicable/factsheets/PDFfactsheets/Meningococcal\\_42072\\_0504I.pdf](http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/Communicable/factsheets/PDFfactsheets/Meningococcal_42072_0504I.pdf) - The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services communicable disease fact sheet.
- <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/Communicable/factsheets/Meningococcal.htm> - Another Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services communicable disease fact sheet.
- <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/LocalHealth/index.htm> - A list of local Wisconsin public health departments and contact information.
- American Academy of Family Physicians, [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)
- Meningitis Foundation of America, [www.musa.org](http://www.musa.org)
- National Meningitis Association, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)