



Meningitis Information

Did You Know?

- Meningitis strikes between 1,400 - 3,000 Americans each year and claims as many as 300 lives.
- Between 100 and 125 cases occur on college campuses every year.
- 5 to 15 college students die each year as a result.
- Cases among teenagers and young adults have more than doubled since 1991.
- The frequency of outbreaks has risen at U.S. colleges and universities during the 1990s.

What Is Meningitis?

- Meningitis is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection.
- It can occur in two forms --- as either meningococcal meningitis, an inflammation that affects the brain and spinal cord, or as meningococemia, the presence of bacteria in the blood.
- The infection can result in permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, limb amputation, kidney failure or death.

What Causes Meningitis?

- This infectious disease is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in older children and young adults in the U.S.

Is There a Vaccine to Help Prevent Meningitis?

- A safe, effective vaccine is available.
- The vaccine is 85% to 100% effective in preventing four kinds of bacteria (serogroups A, C, Y, W---135) that cause about 70% of disease in the U.S.
- The vaccine is safe, with mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site. These side effects last up to 2 days.
- After vaccination, immunity develops within 7 to 10 days and remains effective for approximately 3 to 5 years. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100% of all susceptible individuals.
- Vaccines are available at The Mary Mahoney Health Center and Mercy Clinic Convenient Care.

Is Vaccination Recommended for College Students?

- Certain college students, particularly freshman who live or plan to live in dormitories or residence halls, have a 6-fold increased risk of disease.

- The American College Health Association (ACHA) has adopted the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which states that college students, particularly freshman living in dormitories and residence halls, be educated about meningococcal meningitis and the potential benefits of vaccination.
- Other undergraduate students wishing to reduce their risk of meningitis can also choose to be vaccinated.

Early Symptoms of Meningitis

- High fever
- Neck stiffness
- Rash
- Lethargy
- Vomiting
- Nausea
- Severe headache
- Sensitivity to light

Meningitis usually peaks in late winter and early spring, overlapping flu season, and symptoms can easily be mistaken for the flu. Because the infection progresses quickly, students should seek medical care immediately if 2 or more of these symptoms occur at one time. If untreated, meningitis can lead to shock and death within hours of the first symptoms.

Who Is At Risk for Meningitis?

Meningitis can strike at any age; however, certain groups have a greater risk for contracting the disease:

- College students, particularly freshman, who live in campus residence halls
- Anyone in close contact with a known case
- Anyone with an upper respiratory infection or a compromised immune system
- Anyone traveling to endemic areas of the world where meningitis is prevalent

How Is Meningitis Transmitted?

- Meningococcal bacteria are transmitted through air droplets and direct contact with persons already infected with the disease.
- Direct contact also occurs with shared items, such as cigarettes or drinking glasses, or through intimate contact such as kissing.