

Meningitis

Know Your Risk Learn About Vaccination Options

Dear Student:

As the director of Hofstra University's Health and Wellness Center, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis. On July 22, 2003, Governor Pataki signed New York Public Health Law (NYS PHL) 2167 requiring institutions, including colleges and universities, to distribute information about meningococcal disease and vaccinations to all students meeting enrollment criteria, whether they live on or off campus. This law became effective August 15, 2003.

Hofstra University is required to maintain a record of the following for each student:

- A response to receipt of meningococcal disease and vaccination information signed by the student or student's parent or guardian. This must include information on the availability and cost of meningococcal meningitis vaccine (Menomune);
AND EITHER
- A record of meningococcal meningitis immunization within the past 10 years; OR
- An acknowledgment of meningococcal disease risks and refusal of meningococcal meningitis immunization signed by the student or student's parent or guardian.

Meningitis is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to swelling of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even death.

Cases of meningitis among teens and young adults 15 to 24 years of age (the age of most college students) have more than doubled since 1991. The disease strikes about 3,000 Americans each year and claims about 300 lives. Between 100 and 125 meningitis cases occur on college campuses and as many as 15 students will die from the disease each year.

A vaccine is available that protects against four types of the bacteria that cause meningitis in the United States – types A, C, Y and W-135. These types of bacteria account for nearly two-thirds of meningitis cases among college students.

You may obtain the Menomune vaccine through your primary care provider or at the Hofstra University Health and Wellness Center. Unfortunately, since there is no publicly funded supply of the vaccine, there is a charge of \$85.

I encourage you to carefully review the enclosed material. **Upon receipt of this letter, please complete the enclosed Medical Record form**, which requires an acknowledgment that Hofstra University has informed you of the risks associated with meningococcal meningitis and the available vaccine, and return to the Hofstra University Health and Wellness Center, 275 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11549-2750. We are notifying you of this state law and are asking for your cooperation in complying with these state regulations. This law requires the University to exclude all noncompliant students from attending the University. The Hofstra University Health and Wellness Center is able to assist you in becoming compliant with Public Health Law 2167.

To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, please feel free to contact the Hofstra Health and Wellness Center and/or consult your health care provider. You can also find information about the disease at the New York State Department of Health Web site (www.health.state.ny.us), the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_meningitis.htm), or the American College Health Association's Web site (www.acha.org).

Sincerely,

Maureen B. Houck, FNP
Director
Hofstra University Health and Wellness Center

Meningococcal Vaccine

What You Need to Know

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and the spinal cord).

Who gets meningococcal disease?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children. For some college students, such as first-year students living in residence halls, there is an increased risk of meningitis disease. Between 100 and 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses every year in the United States; between five and 15 college students die each year as a result of infection. Currently no data is available regarding whether children at overnight camps or residential schools are at the same increased risk for the disease. However, these children can be in settings similar to first-year students living in residence halls. Other persons at increased risk include household contacts of a person known to have had this disease, and people traveling to parts of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

How is the germ meningococcus spread?

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Many people carry this particular germ in their nose and throat without any signs of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

High fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. Among people who develop meningococcal disease, 10 to 15 percent die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, kidney failure, loss of arms or legs, or chronic nervous system problems can occur.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

Antibiotics, such as penicillin G or ceftriaxone, can be used to treat people with meningococcal disease.

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?

Yes, a safe and effective vaccine is available. The vaccine is 85 to 100 percent effective in preventing four kinds of bacteria (serogroups A, C, Y, W-135) that cause about 70 percent of the diseases in the United States. The vaccine is safe, with mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to two days. After vaccination, immunity develops within seven to 10 days and remains effective for approximately three to five years. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100 percent of all susceptible individuals.

How do I get more information about meningococcal disease and vaccination?

Contact your family physician or the Hofstra University Health and Wellness Center at (516) 463-6745. Additional information is also available on the Web sites for the New York State Department of Health, www.health.state.ny.us, and the American College Health Association, www.acha.org.