

## Meningococcal Disease and Vaccination Fact Sheet

The University of Saint Mary requires all residential students to obtain vaccination for meningococcal disease. Proof of vaccination must be submitted prior to moving into the residence halls.

### MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION \*

#### **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal meningitis and meningococemia are 2 forms of meningococcal disease. Meningococcal meningitis is an infection of the tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Meningococemia is an infection of the blood and may also involve other organs. Both of these illnesses are caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

#### **How are the bacteria spread?**

The bacteria are spread from person-to-person through saliva (i.e., spit) or respiratory secretions. You must be in close contact with a sick person's saliva or respiratory secretions in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact with someone who has been sick is involvement in activities that result in being directly sneezed or coughed upon, kissing, sharing a water bottle or sharing eating/drinking utensils. It is not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of illness?**

**Meningitis:** Signs and symptoms of meningitis include a sudden onset of a high fever, a stiff neck, headache, nausea, vomiting, and/or mental confusion. Changes in behavior such as confusion, sleepiness, and being hard to wake up are important symptoms of this illness. A rash may be present. **Meningococemia:** Signs and symptoms of meningococemia include a sudden onset of fever, chills, and feeling unusually weak or tired. A rash may be present.

#### **Who is at risk for contracting meningococcal disease?**

Anyone can contract meningococcal disease, but it is most common in infants, children, and young adults. Other people at increased risk for whom routine vaccination is recommended are college freshmen living in dormitories (who are not adequately immunized), microbiologists who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria, U.S. military recruits, anyone who has a damaged spleen or whose spleen has been removed; anyone who has terminal complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder), anyone who is traveling to the countries which have an outbreak of meningococcal disease, and those who might have been exposed to meningitis during an outbreak.

#### **What vaccinations are available?**

MCV4 is the preferred vaccine for people 2 to 55 years of age in these risk groups, but MPSV4 can be used if MCV4 is not available. MPSV4 should be used for adults over 55, who are at risk.

#### **What should I do if I have had contact with a person who has a meningococcal illness?**

If you have had close contact with a person who has been diagnosed with a meningococcal illness, you should call your health care provider and get an antibiotic. If you have had contact with an ill person, but have not had close contact, you should be aware of the symptoms of illness and contact your doctor immediately if you have any of these symptoms.

#### **Where can I get more information?**

- Your Local Health Department
- <http://www.cdc.gov/health/default.htm>
- Your doctor, nurse, or local health center

\* This information is based on the Kansas Department of Health & Environment Meningococcal Fact Sheet  
[www.kdheks.gov/epi/Fact\\_Sheets/Meningococcal\\_factsheet.doc](http://www.kdheks.gov/epi/Fact_Sheets/Meningococcal_factsheet.doc)