



WINTER NEWSLETTER

Winter Is Peak Season For Meningococcal Meningitis Are Your Children Protected?

Throughout fall and winter, parents are accustomed to tending to runny noses, and they are on the look-out for signs of flu. What many parents don't know is that late winter is the beginning of the peak season for a potentially fatal form of meningitis, the symptoms of which often mimic those of the flu. Meningitis is one of the forms of meningococcal disease, and it can very quickly lead to death or disability in an otherwise healthy child. Although adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, vaccines are available to help protect them.

Meningococcal disease is rare, but it can kill within 48 hours of the first symptoms. For those who survive, up to two in ten will suffer permanent disability such as brain damage, deafness or limb amputations. Health officials recommend meningococcal vaccination for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, ideally at their 11-12 year-old checkup.

Health officials believe the increased risk in adolescents and young adults is connected to activities, such as living in a dormitory or boarding school, or participating on sports teams, that put them in long-term, close contact with others who may carry the deadly bacteria. Bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread more easily in close-contact environments or by direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person, e.g., through coughing, sneezing or kissing.

For families who have experienced the disease, the effects can be devastating. "My son Evan, a healthy, active 19-year-old college junior, died needlessly from meningococcal disease. No one ever told me about vaccination. If they had, my son would have been immunized, and would be alive today," said Lynn Bozof, President, National Meningitis Association "Parents need to know about meningococcal disease and understand that it can be prevented. No parent should ever have to lose a child to a vaccine-preventable disease."

The number of meningococcal disease cases changes from year to year. From 1998-2007, on average, 1,500 Americans were infected each year and about one in nine died. Among adolescents and young adults, about one in seven died.

Early symptoms of meningococcal disease often mimic those of the flu, including fever, headache, fatigue, muscle aches and stiff neck, making it difficult to identify and diagnose. Due to the fast moving nature of this disease and potentially devastating outcomes, prevention is critical.

"Although meningococcal disease can be contracted at any point throughout the year, cases tend to peak during the late-winter and early-spring," says Susan J. Rehm, MD, Medical Director, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. "Immunization is the most effective way to prevent this disease among adolescents and young adults."

For more information on vaccines recommended for adolescents, please visit www.adolescentvaccination.org.

Help ensure that your children remain healthy this winter. If your child is 11 to 18 years old, please contact us for more information or to schedule a vaccination appointment.



A public education initiative brought to you by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases in collaboration with leading healthcare organizations. The goals of this program are supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information and a list of supporting organizations and additional resource materials, please visit, <http://stopmeningitis.nfidinitiatives.org>.