



PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

Meningococcal Disease: What You Should Know

Immunization Recommended for Adolescents 11 through 18 Years of Age to Prevent a Serious Infection that Causes Meningitis and Blood Infection.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is any infection caused by bacteria called meningococci (muh-nin-jo-cox-sigh). This infection most often leads to severe swelling around the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or infection of the bloodstream (sepsis); it can also lead to other less severe illnesses, like arthritis and pneumonia. The number of meningococcal disease cases changes from year to year. From 1998 to 2007, about 1,500 Americans were infected each year.

Are adolescents and young adults more vulnerable?

Yes, adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to this potentially deadly disease. In fact, nearly 15 percent of all cases occur among adolescents and young adults and approximately 10 to 14 percent of these cases are fatal.

Is meningococcal disease serious?

Meningococcal disease is very serious. In the general population, about one in nine people who get it die, even with appropriate treatment. The risk of death among adolescents and young adults is even higher, with nearly one in seven dying. Additionally, up to one in five survivors will have permanent problems including brain damage, hearing loss and limb amputations.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal bacteria are spread through coughing and sneezing or by direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person (for example, through kissing).

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

The early symptoms of meningococcal disease can include fever, headache, body aches and a stiff neck. Because these early symptoms may be mild and similar to those of viral illnesses like a cold or the flu, it would not be unusual for a person to delay seeking treatment. But symptoms can progress very fast, killing an otherwise healthy young person in 48 hours or less, so it is critical to seek medical attention quickly. Other symptoms that also may occur are nausea, vomiting, confusion, sleepiness, sensitivity to light and a rash (usually dark purple spots on the arms or legs).



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>.

Who should get the vaccine?

U.S. health authorities recommend vaccination for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, ideally at their 11-12 year-old checkup. People outside this age range who are at increased risk for meningococcal disease should also get vaccinated.

How many doses are needed?

Most people will only need one dose, but those who remain at increased risk may need to be revaccinated after three to five years. Your health care provider can tell you more about who is at ongoing increased risk.

Why is vaccination recommended for adolescents and young adults?

Due to lifestyle factors, such as prolonged, close proximity among large groups (e.g., dorms, sleep-away camps) and smoking (including second-hand smoke), adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for getting the disease.

Will vaccination prevent meningococcal disease?

The vaccines protect against four of the five most common types of meningococcal bacteria (called types A, C, Y and W-135). These four types cause the majority of cases in adolescents and young adults. Currently, no vaccine is available in the U.S. to protect against type B, which is most common in infants but can cause the disease in adolescents and young adults.

Is vaccination effective?

Yes. Conjugate meningococcal vaccines, which are available for children, adolescents and adults (aged 2 to 55 years), provide protection against four of the five serogroups or types of meningococcal bacteria that cause almost all clinical disease among adolescents and young adults. There a different type of vaccine (called a polysaccharide vaccine) that can be used for at-risk people older than 55 and in cases when the conjugate vaccine is not available. It protects against the same four strains.

Is meningococcal vaccination safe?

Yes. Meningococcal vaccination is safe. As with all vaccines, there can be minor reactions, including pain and redness at the injection site, headache, fatigue or a vague feeling of discomfort. Vaccines can be given at the same time as the pertussis booster that many children receive during the adolescent 11-12 year-old checkup.

Who recommends the vaccination?

Meningococcal vaccination is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age.



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Where can I get more information?

If you want more information about meningococcal disease and the benefits of vaccination, talk to your health care provider. The following websites below offer additional information about meningococcal disease and the benefits of vaccination:

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org

American Academy of Family Physicians
www.aafp.org

American College Health Association
www.acha.org

American College of Physicians
www.acponline.org

American Medical Association
www.ama-assn.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/vac-mening-fs.htm

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases' Adolescent Immunization Web site
www.adolescentvaccination.org

Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
www.adolescenthealth.org

National Meningitis Association
www.nmaus.org



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