

New School Immunization Requirement for 12th Graders

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Meningitis is a serious illness that causes infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, and can also lead to blood infections (septicemia). Meningitis can be caused by many different bacteria and viruses. Bacterial meningitis is commonly caused by the bacteria, *Neisseria meningitidis*, also known as meningococcus. This disease is often severe and can be deadly. Other people may have permanent disabilities, such as deafness, brain damage, seizures, and loss of limbs. Doctors can treat meningococcal disease with antibiotics, but urgent medical attention is very important. Being up-to-date with the recommended vaccine is the best method of protecting yourself.

Symptoms of the disease may include fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and fatigue. After exposure to the bacteria, symptoms generally develop within 3 to 7 days. These symptoms may seem similar to influenza and come on quickly. However, they can rapidly worsen and a person should seek medical attention immediately.

Meningococcal disease is spread from person to person by contact with secretions from the nose and throat, such as kissing, sharing silverware or beverage containers, and having close social contact, such as living in the same household. This disease is not spread through casual contact or touching the same object.

Some people are at an increased risk of developing the disease, especially first year college students living in residence halls. Additionally, this includes people who have a damaged spleen, people with certain immune disorders, and household contacts of someone with the disease.

The treatment for bacterial meningitis is antibiotics; however, it is very important to start treatment as soon as possible. If someone is diagnosed with bacterial meningitis, a doctor may recommend an antibiotic for close contacts and household members. This prophylaxis treatment is meant to prevent someone from contracting the disease.

Children age 11 to 12 and teens can protect themselves from the disease by being vaccinated. Two types of meningococcal vaccines are currently available to prevent the most common causes of meningococcal disease. One is the meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY) and the other is the serogroup B meningococcal vaccine (Men B). Talk with your healthcare provider regarding the appropriate vaccine for your child. The meningococcal conjugate vaccine is highly effective at protecting against four common strains of the bacteria. However, they are not 100% effective and does not protect a person against all the stains of each bacteria. Therefore, it is imperative for a person to be aware of and recognize the symptoms of the disease. All children should get the first dose at age 11-12 and a booster dose at 16 years of age. Starting with the 2020-21 school year, 12th graders will be required to have documentation or a legal exemption for the booster dose of the meningococcal vaccine. If you do not have health insurance, or your insurance does not cover the cost of the meningococcal vaccine, ask your health care provider for low cost shots through the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program.

For further information, contact the Minnesota Department of Health website at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/meningitis/index.html> and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html.