

May 2007

SUBJECT: Meningococcal (Meningitis) Vaccine Information

Dear Student and Parents:

We would like to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection, and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American College Health Association (ACHA) and recent Washington State legislative requirements.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has revised its recommendation on meningitis vaccination. The new recommendation is for routine vaccination of all 11-12 year olds, 15 year olds entering high school, and college freshmen living in dormitories. Several states in the nation have passed legislation requiring meningococcal vaccination for admission to institutions of higher education. The State of Washington does not require the vaccination, but it does require notification of all students and parents regarding the risk of meningococcal disease for college students residing in dormitories and the availability of the meningococcal vaccine. The American College Health Association (ACHA) recommends that undergraduate college students, particularly freshmen who live in or plan to live in dormitories/residence halls, receive the vaccination.

Meningococcal disease is expressed as either meningococcal meningitis (an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord), or meningococemia (the presence of bacteria in the blood). Meningococcal disease is rare; however, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. Unfortunately, meningococcal disease progresses rapidly, often in as little as 12 hours. Between 100 and 125 meningococcal disease cases occur on college campuses annually; 10-15% of patients die in spite of treatment. Among those who survive meningococcal infection, approximately 20 percent suffer long-term consequences, such as brain damage, kidney disease, hearing loss or limb amputations.

College students living in residence halls have an increased risk of contracting meningococcal disease. Other lifestyle factors which may increase risk of infection in college students include: sharing beverages or utensils, going to bars, active or passive smoking, attendance at a school with students from geographically diverse areas, and irregular sleeping patterns.

The ACHA recommends Menactra (a new conjugated meningococcal vaccine) as the meningococcal vaccine for incoming college freshmen. Menactra vaccine protects against four types of meningococcal bacterial (types A, C, Y, and W-135). These types account for nearly two thirds of meningitis cases among college students. **Menactra vaccination appears to provide approximately 8 years of protection.** Menactra vaccine will be available at the Welty Center for students who did not receive the immunization prior to arrival at college.

We encourage you to learn more about meningitis and the vaccine. Although incoming first-year students are not required to have the vaccine, we strongly recommend vaccination against meningococcal disease. Further information about meningococcal disease on college campuses is available on the Internet at:

<http://www.acha.org>
(click on the **information & resources, meningitis on campus, disease information** and then **overview** links)

We have the Menactra (Meningococcal Meningitis) available at the health center at a standard cost.

We will also have Gardasil (HPV) vaccine doses available at the health center for female students at a standard cost.
