

Summer 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis, and a new recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend that college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories and residence halls, be educated about meningitis and the benefits of vaccination. The panel based its recommendation on recent studies showing that college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories, have a six fold increased risk for meningitis. The recommendation further states that information about the disease and vaccination is appropriate for other undergraduate students who also wish to reduce their risk for the disease. Many of our students visit and stay at college campuses.

Meningitis is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to swelling of the membrane surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even death.

Cases of meningitis among teens and young adults 15 to 24 years of age (the age of most college students) have more than doubled since 1991. The disease strikes about 3,000 Americans each year and claims about 300 lives. Between 100 and 125 meningitis cases occur on college campuses and as many as 15 students will die from the disease.

A vaccine is available that protects against four types of bacteria that cause meningitis in the United States types A,C,Y and W-135. These types account for nearly two thirds of meningitis cases among college students.

I encourage you and your child to learn more about meningococcal meningitis and the vaccine. For more information, please feel free to contact the Cook County Department of Public Health at (708) 492-2150 and/or consult your child's physician. You can also find information about the disease through the following web sites: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov/ncidod, or the Meningitis Foundation of America at www.musa.org. Besides your regular M.D. these clinics are available:

The vaccine can be obtained by your physician or at any of the low cost clinics (see reverse side).

*****Must have a doctor's order for the Menactra vaccine**

Students under 18 need parental/guardian consent.

"College bound" includes students leaving for college and junior and senior students who will be actively visiting college dorms.

Sincerely,

Kathie Sczepanski R.N., M.A., Certified School Nurse