

## DREW UNIVERSITY STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

New Jersey State Law requires that new students attending N.J. colleges and universities receive the Meningococcal Meningitis A,C,Y,W-135 vaccine prior to entering campus housing. Meningitis is an infection of the spinal cord fluid and the fluid surrounding the brain. There are two major types of meningitis: The most common is viral meningitis, which can be caused by a variety of viruses. While viral meningitis may be a serious illness people usually recover completely in several days.

The other type, bacterial meningitis, is caused by several kinds of bacteria. The most serious is *Neisseria Meningitidis*, which causes Meningococcal meningitis. Meningococcal disease is the leading cause of bacterial blood stream infection and meningitis in children and young adults in the United States. Surveillance of Meningococcal disease among U.S. college students found a *modestly elevated rate of this disease among first-year students living in residence halls*. Data has also suggested that certain social behaviors such as, exposure to passive and active smoking, bar patronage and excessive alcohol consumption may increase students' risk for contracting the disease.

Though rare, the effects of Meningococcal disease can be devastating. Despite treatment with appropriate intravenous antibiotic and optimal medical care, the overall fatality rate of meningococcal meningitis is 9 to 12 percent, with a rate of up to 40 percent among patients with meningococcal blood stream infection. Eleven to 19 percent of survivors of meningococcal disease have permanent injury, such as hearing loss, neurologic disability, or loss of a limb.

One of the challenges of diagnosing Meningococcal disease is that its symptoms are difficult to distinguish from those of more common but less serious illnesses. Generally, symptoms include a sudden onset of headache, fever, and stiffness of the neck sometimes accompanied by nausea, vomiting, light sensitivity, confusion, or a purplish rash. *This illness can progress rapidly* with tragic consequences in a few hours unless appropriate intravenous antibiotic treatment is started shortly after the symptoms begin.

Most cases of Meningococcal disease occur sporadically or as individual cases without apparent connection to any case or person

Persons directly exposed to an infected person's oral secretions (i.e., kissing, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation) are at elevated risk for contracting the disease. Meningococcal bacteria is NOT spread through casual contact. Persons who have had close contact with the oral secretions of an infected person need post-exposure antibiotic therapy preferably within 48 hours to prevent the disease This even includes those who have received the Meningococcal meningitis vaccine.

## MENINGITIS INFORMATION

The best way to decrease the risk of Meningococcal disease is vaccination. Currently, there are three Meningococcal vaccines licensed and available in the U.S. The preferred Meningococcal vaccine is the CONJUGATE type (in the U.S., Menactra™ or Menveo®); however, the polysaccharide type of the vaccine (in the U.S., Menomune®) is acceptable as long as vaccination occurred within 5 years of college entry. If not, a repeat vaccination must be obtained. Meningococcal vaccination is 85 to 100 percent effective against four of the five most common types of the bacteria that cause the disease. Studies show that up to 80 percent of cases of Meningococcal meningitis on college campuses are vaccine-preventable.

It is important for recipients of the Meningococcal vaccine to remember that no vaccine offers 100% protection. The Meningococcal vaccine consists of only 4 of the 5 most common types of Meningococcal disease. This means that the vaccine does not offer protection against all types of Meningococcal bacteria that cause this disease. In addition, not all cases of meningitis are caused by Meningococcal bacteria. Therefore, if symptoms of meningitis should develop, a vaccinated person should still seek immediate medical attention.

Incoming DREW students can obtain this vaccination from their personal health care provider or DREW Health Services. Call Health Services at 973/408-3414 for more information, or visit our website at [www.drew.edu/health](http://www.drew.edu/health).