

Meningococcal Disease Information for College Students

Washington State Law requires that information on meningococcal disease must be provided to each enrolled first-time student. Please read and understand your risk for Meningococcal disease and how you can prevent it.

What is meningococcal disease?

It is a serious illness caused by bacteria that can cause:

- Blood infections (septicemia), which causes bleeding into the skin or organs
- Swelling of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord (meningitis)

Who is at risk?

College students have a higher risk of getting meningococcal disease because of common every day social interaction in a small space. This is especially true for students living in residence halls or group living arrangements.

How does it spread?

Meningococcal disease requires close contact to spread. It is spread through saliva by coughing, kissing, or sharing anything by mouth with an infected person, such as eating utensils, lip balm, or toothbrushes.

What are the symptoms?

Meningococcal meningitis and meningococcal septicemia are both very serious and can be deadly in a matter of hours.

Meningococcal Meningitis

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Confusion

Meningococcal Septicemia

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Severe aches or pain
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhea
- Cold chills; cold hands and feet
- In the later stages, a dark purple rash on upper and lower limbs

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

Seek medical attention right away if you or another student develop symptoms of meningococcal disease. If untreated, meningococcal disease may lead to brain damage, disability, and death.

How is it treated?

Meningococcal disease is treated with antibiotics, which are most effective when given immediately after symptoms begin. Anyone who has been in contact with a person with the disease should seek treatment and receive antibiotics within 24 hours.

How is it prevented?

To prevent getting meningococcal disease, there are two different vaccinations available. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend the appropriate vaccination. Vaccinations can prevent up to 80% of meningococcal disease cases in teens and young adults.

- **Meningococcal ACWY vaccine** is a routine recommendation for all children aged 11 to 12 years with a booster for teens aged 16 to 18 years.
- **Meningococcal B vaccine** may be given to teens and adults aged 16 to 23 who have rare health conditions OR are at risk because of meningococcal B disease outbreak.

In addition to vaccination, it is important to engage in healthy behaviors:

- Cover your mouth when you cough
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils

Where can I find these vaccines?

Your healthcare provider is the best place to receive these recommended vaccines. You can also get them at pharmacies, community health clinics, or public health departments. Use the HealthMap Vaccine Finder at <https://vaccinefinder.org/> to search for locations near you that offer immunizations.

You may choose to get the meningococcal vaccines at the Pacific Lutheran Health Center. Other recommended vaccines available at the PLU Health Center including Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Human Papilloma Virus, Annual Influenza and Tetanus. Schedule online or call the clinic at 253 535-7337 to make an appointment to get up to date on your vaccinations. **Domestic students 18 years of age and younger may be eligible to receive immunizations free of cost.**

When receiving any vaccine, ask the provider to record the vaccine in the state or local registry, if available. This helps healthcare providers at future visits know what vaccines you have already received.

If you would like more information on Washington State's Meningococcal Education Mandate, as well as other resources on meningococcal disease prevention, please visit <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/Immunization/CollegeStudents>.



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