

THE DISEASE

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

The infection is spread by direct contact with infected individuals (for example, sharing a glass or cigarette, or kissing) or through the air via droplets of respiratory secretions (for example, coughing or sneezing).

WHO IS AT RISK?

Meningitis can strike at any age; however, certain groups have a greater risk for contracting the disease:

-College students, particularly freshmen, who live in campus residence halls. Social aspects of college life also appear to be risk factors. Smoking, exposure to second-hand smoke, excessive alcohol consumption, and bar patronage all increase the chances that one will contract meningitis from an infected individual.

-Anyone in close contact with a known case of meningitis.

-Anyone with an upper respiratory infection and/or a weak immune system.

-Anyone traveling to endemic areas of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE
MEDICAL ARTS BUILDING
3708 FIFTH AVE., SUITE 500
PITTSBURGH, PA 15213
PHONE (412)383-1800
FAX (412)383-1820
www.studhlth.pitt.edu

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
POLICE DEPARTMENT
FOR CAMPUS EMERGENCY, DIAL 811
FOR NON-EMERGENCY (412)624-2121

HOSPITALS/CLINICS

UPMC MONTIFIORE & PRESBYTERIAN
200 LOTHROP ST., OAKLAND
PHONE (412)578-8436

UPMC SHADYSIDE
5230 CENTRE AVE., SHADYSIDE
PHONE (412)623-2446

ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
3441 FORBES AVE.
PITTSBURGH, PA 15213
PHONE (412)578-8060

INTERNET RESOURCES

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL
AND PREVENTION
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo

AMERICAN COLLEGE HEALTH ASSOCIATION
www.acha.org

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
www.health.state.pa.us

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

Facts About Meningitis

Information for Students and Parents

THE DISEASE

WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection. It can occur in two forms—as either *meningococcal meningitis*, an inflammation that affects the brain and spinal cord, or as *meningococemia*, the presence of bacteria in the blood. Permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, limb amputation, kidney failure, or death can result from the infection.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms are similar to those of influenza and include *high fever, rash, vomiting, severe headache, neck stiffness, lethargy, nausea, and sensitivity to light*.

Meningitis usually peaks in late winter and early spring, overlapping the flu season, and its symptoms can be easily mistaken for the flu. Due to the quick progression of the infection, students should seek medical care immediately if they experience 2 or more of these symptoms at the same time. If left untreated, meningitis can lead to shock and death within hours of the initial symptoms.

PREVENTION

HOW DO YOU PREVENT MENINGITIS?

In February 2005, the CDC recommended a new vaccine to prevent meningococcus. A previous version was effective against 4 of the 5 different types (A, C, Y and W-135), but required booster doses every 3-5 years. The new vaccine protects against the same types but probably will not require booster doses.

HOW SAFE IS THE VACCINE?

Side effects of the vaccine are mild and infrequent, consisting primarily of redness and swelling at the injection site lasting up to two days. The vaccine should not be given during any acute illness and should not be administered to individuals who are sensitive to thimerosal or any other components of the vaccine. Pregnant women should consult their physician regarding the risks and benefits of immunization.

DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

Yes. The new vaccine protects against most of the meningococcal disease caused by types A, C, Y and W-135. Because the vaccine does not include type B, which accounts for about one-third of cases in adolescents, it does not prevent all cases. Adolescents or adults who received the previous meningococcal vaccine can receive the new vaccine.

HOW CAN COLLEGE STUDENTS FURTHER PROTECT THEMSELVES?

A person can maximize their own body's immune system by eating a balanced diet, exercising, and getting adequate amounts of sleep. Also, avoid excessive use of cigarettes and alcohol, in particular, do not make a habit of sharing drinks and cigarettes.