

Helping to protect your child from danger: meningococcal disease

Dear

Being exposed to risky or dangerous behavior is part of adolescence, and it can help teach children how to make the right decision about behaviors such as smoking or drinking. As a parent, it is natural for you to do everything you can to protect your family. That's why we want you to know about the importance of meningococcal vaccination to help protect your teen.

Booster vaccination is recommended at 16-18 years of age

In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended a meningococcal booster dose at 16 years of age.¹ This booster dose will help protect your teen from the potential risks associated with meningococcal disease. Please take a moment to read through this information to educate yourself and your family about meningococcal disease.

Why is meningococcal disease so serious?

Also known as meningitis, meningococcal disease is a rare but very dangerous bacterial infection. Even in healthy people, the disease can develop quickly and cause life-threatening complications within hours. Up to 1 in 5 survivors can suffer from lifelong complications, including loss of a limb, hearing loss, and neurological damage.^{2,3}

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

According to the CDC, the best way to prevent meningococcal disease is through vaccination. Who should get vaccinated?^{1,4}

- Adolescents 11-18 years of age should receive a routine vaccination. The best time to get vaccinated is at the 11- to 12-year checkup.
- Teens 16 years of age should receive a booster, if previously vaccinated at age 11
- College freshmen living in dormitories, if not previously vaccinated
- Anyone at increased risk for meningococcal disease

How is meningococcal disease spread?

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread from person to person (for example: coughing, sneezing, or direct contact with an infected person through kissing or sharing drinking glasses).⁵

What are the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease?

At first, meningococcal disease may feel like the flu. However, the following symptoms should be addressed immediately to avoid potentially fatal complications.^{2,3}



- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Rash
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Light sensitivity
- Altered mental status

Now that you are armed with this important information, you may be better able to help protect your family against this vaccine-preventable disease. As always, talk to your health-care professional about any questions or concerns you may have. For more information, you can also visit the CDC Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/faq.html>. Please schedule vaccinations for those at risk.

Sincerely,

References: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Updated recommendations for use of meningococcal conjugate vaccines—Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2010. *MMWR*. 2011;60(3):72-76. 2. CDC. Meningitis: signs and symptoms. <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/symptoms.html>. Accessed November 18, 2011. 3. CDC. Meningococcal disease. In: Atkinson W, Wolfe C, Hamborsky J, eds. *Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases*. 12th ed. Washington DC: Public Health Foundation; 2011:194-204. 4. CDC. Notice to readers: revised recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to vaccinate all persons aged 11-18 years with meningococcal conjugate vaccine. *MMWR*. 2007;56(31):794-795. 5. CDC. Prevention and control of meningococcal disease: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *MMWR*. 2005;54(RR-7):1-21.