

Meningitis Vaccines for Teens

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid and lining around the brain and spinal cord. It can lead to brain damage, hearing loss, learning difficulties, and even death. Septicemia is a bloodstream infection which can lead to the loss of an arm or leg, or death. Meningitis and septicemia are forms of meningococcal disease caused by several strains of bacteria. Even with treatment, about one in ten people with meningococcal disease will die.

Meningococcal disease can spread from person to person. The bacteria that cause this infection can spread when people have close or lengthy contact with someone's saliva, like through kissing or coughing, especially if they are living in the same place. Teens and young adults are at increased risk for meningococcal disease. Living in community settings such as dorms or military barracks can increase the risk of acquiring the disease.

Healthy people can carry the bacteria in their nose or throat without getting sick. These people can "carry" the disease to others. The symptoms of bacterial meningitis can appear quickly or over several days. These symptoms include sudden onset of a high fever, headache and stiff neck. Other symptoms may include: nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light, and confusion.

There are five primary types of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease: A, C, Y, W and B. Until recently, there were only vaccines available to protect against A, C, Y, and W. A new vaccine is now available to protect against meningitis type B which was responsible for recent college outbreaks at Princeton and the University of Oregon. At the University of Oregon, six college students became infected and one, an eighteen year old college freshman women died.

Meningitis B is responsible for 30% of invasive meningococcal disease cases in individuals aged eleven through twenty-four. On average, one in ten adolescents and young adults who develop meningitis B will die from it.

Meningococcal vaccines have been studied very carefully and are safe and effective. Talk to your child's health care provider to learn more about meningococcal vaccine and other vaccines that your child may need. You can also find out more about these vaccines at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens.

This article was submitted by Lisa Bohrer, R.N.,BC, the Community Health and Wellness Manager and Vaccine Specialist, for the PharmaCare Network. To discuss vaccinations options or to make an appointment, contact her at 301-689-2909 or lbohrer@3ipc.com