

MENINGITIS INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 6 – 12

Again this year, school districts are required to inform parents of students enrolled in grades 6 through 12 about the dangers of meningococcal disease, commonly known as bacterial meningitis, a rare but potentially fatal infection that can occur among teenagers and college students. While meningococcal disease is rare and difficult to contract, it is very serious. There is now a vaccine that may help to prevent this infection.

Meningococcal bacteria can potentially be transmitted through close contact with an infected person by direct contact with respiratory and/or oral secretions from an infected person (for example, through sharing drinking containers or kissing). Teenagers and college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases every year. Meningococcal disease can be misdiagnosed as something less serious, because early symptoms like high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck, are similar to those of common viral illnesses. The disease can progress rapidly and can cause death or permanent disability with 48 hours of initial symptoms.

Up to 83 percent of all cases among teens and college students may potentially be prevented through immunization, the most effective way to prevent this disease. A meningococcal vaccine is available that protects against four out of five strains of bacterium that cause meningococcal disease in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC) and other leading medical organizations recommend routine meningococcal immunization for adolescents during the preadolescent doctor's visit (11- to 12-year-olds), adolescents at high school entry (15-year-olds) if they have not previously been immunized, and for college freshmen living in dormitories.

Most Sheboygan County health care providers offer this vaccine to their patients in their offices. Many health insurance plans cover the cost of this vaccine. The Sheboygan County Division of Public Health provides this vaccine to high school students and persons living in dormitories for the first time who do not have health insurance that would cover the cost of vaccines.

We suggest you contact your child's health care provider or the Sheboygan County division of Public Health at 920-459-3030 to arrange for your high school or college age student to be vaccinated.

To learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information and public health resources visit the following web sites:

www.cdc.gov – This CDC website includes the CDC recommendations and information on the meningococcal vaccine.

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/Communicable/factsheets/PDFfactsheets/Meningococcal_42072_0504.pdf - The Wisconsin Dept. of Health and Family Services communicable disease fact sheet.