

# Meningococcal Meningitis

Possible to Prevent.  
Dangerous to Ignore.

**T**here is a rare but sometimes deadly disease, called meningococcal meningitis, that strikes college students.

The disease spreads quickly and within hours of the first symptoms can cause organ failure, brain damage, amputations of limbs, or death.

Parents and students should learn more about meningococcal meningitis and consider immunization. Vaccination can prevent most cases of disease on college campuses.

## Talk to Your Doctor About Meningitis Vaccination

Parents and students are encouraged to learn more about meningococcal meningitis and to talk to a physician about immunization.

## National Meningitis Association

The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is a nonprofit organization founded to inform families, medical professionals, and others about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and methods of prevention.

Its mission is to help ensure every child is offered protection from the disease through vaccination programs; to support research and development of improved meningitis vaccines and treatments for people stricken by meningitis; and to provide support to survivors of meningococcal meningitis and meningococemia and their families.

For more information about NMA and its activities, or to contact a member of NMA, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA (1-866-366-3662) or visit [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).



National Meningitis Association  
22910 Chestnut Road  
Lexington Park, MD 20653  
1-866-FONE-NMA  
[www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)



## Meningitis on Campus

Don't Wait.  
Vaccinate.

What Parents and Students  
Need to Know.



## Facts About Meningococcal Meningitis

- College students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories, have a higher risk of getting this contagious disease.
- Each year, the disease strikes about 2,500 Americans and 10 to 15 percent of them will die.
- Up to 20 percent of survivors have long-term disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, or limb amputations.
- The disease can take one of two forms: swelling of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord, or the more deadly meningococemia, an infection of the blood.
- Meningococcal meningitis is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

## College Students at Special Risk

Overall, cases of this disease among adolescents and young adults have increased by nearly 60 percent since the early 1990s.

Lifestyle factors common among college students seem to be linked to the disease: crowded living situations such as dormitories, going to bars, smoking, and irregular sleep habits.

Freshmen living in dormitories are up to six times more likely to get the disease than other people.



## Be Alert: Early Flu-Like Symptoms

Meningococcal meningitis is often misdiagnosed because its early signs are much like those of the flu or migraines. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, and exhaustion.

Later, after the disease has taken hold, a rash may appear. If any of these symptoms are present and are unusually sudden and severe, call a physician or the college student health center. Don't wait.

## How Meningitis Is Spread

The disease is spread through air droplets and direct contact with someone who's infected. That includes: coughing, kissing, and sharing cigarettes, utensils, cups, or lip balm – anything an infected person touches with his or her mouth.

Students can reduce their risk by considering vaccination and/or by not sharing certain things: utensils, beverages, cigarettes, etc.

Most cases occur in late winter or early spring when college students are away at school.

## Consider Vaccination

Immunization can prevent up to 80 percent of meningococcal meningitis cases in adolescents and young adults:

- The vaccine is safe and effective against four of the five types of the bacteria responsible for meningococcal meningitis in the United States — and for the majority of cases in the college-age population.
- Protection lasts approximately three to five years, the length of time most students are away at college.
- As with all vaccines, there may be minor reactions (pain and redness at the injection site or a mild fever).

## College Student Immunization Recommendations

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American College Health Association, and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that:

- College students and their parents should be told about the risk of meningococcal meningitis and the benefits of immunization.
- The vaccine should be made available to students who ask to be immunized.



## Find Out More

For more information about meningococcal meningitis and the vaccine that can help prevent it, visit the following web sites:

- National Meningitis Association, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)
- Meningitis Foundation of America, [www.musa.org](http://www.musa.org)
- American College Health Association, [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

For medical advice about the meningococcal vaccine, consult your physician, college health service, or local public health department.