

Important Information for Parents About Meningococcal Disease and Meningococcal Vaccines from the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Oklahoma State Department of Health

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the tissue lining and fluid that surround the spinal cord and the brain. Meningitis is usually caused by a virus or a bacterium. Meningitis caused by a virus is usually less severe and goes away without any special treatment, while meningitis caused by bacteria can be severe and may cause:

- Brain damage,
- Hearing loss,
- Amputation of arms or legs,
- Learning disabilities, or
- Death.

What types of bacteria cause meningitis?

There are several types of bacteria that may cause meningitis, including:

- *Neisseria meningitidis*
- *Streptococcus pneumoniae*,
- *Group B streptococcal disease*, and
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib).

This information sheet will focus on the disease caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* (Nay-sear-e-a men-in-git-it-dis), which is rare but especially risky for people of certain ages. Disease caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* is usually referred to as "meningococcal disease" (men-IN-jo-kok-ul disease). Many persons are exposed to *Neisseria meningitidis* and carry the bacteria in their nose and throat for weeks or months and spread the bacteria to others, but do not become sick themselves. If the meningococcal bacteria invade the body, they may cause a rapidly spreading infection of the blood, lung infection, or meningitis. More information about the other kinds of bacteria that cause meningitis can be found at the web sites listed in the box at the end of this information sheet.

Who is at risk from meningococcal disease?

Babies less than a year old have the highest risk for meningococcal disease, but no vaccine is available for babies. The risk of meningococcal disease increases for teenagers and young adults 15 through age 21 years of age, because of behaviors that spread the disease. On average, two or three people in this age group get meningococcal disease every year in Oklahoma. More than half of these could be prevented by vaccine.

College students, military personnel, and other people living in close quarters or dormitory-style housing have a greater chance of contracting the disease than other persons their age. Other persons at increased risk include smokers or persons frequently exposed to second-hand smoke, those with immune system

problems, those without a spleen, or international travelers going to countries where the disease is more common.

How is the disease spread?

The disease is spread by respiratory droplets produced by a person harboring the bacteria and expelled a short distance by laughing, singing, coughing, or sneezing. The bacteria may also be spread by direct contact with the respiratory fluids of someone who is infected. That includes kissing, or sharing a water bottle, food item, cigarettes, lipstick, lip balm, mouth guard or anything an infected person touches with his or her nose or mouth.

Why is meningococcal disease dangerous?

Meningococcal disease is relatively uncommon with about 2,500 people affected every year in the United States. However, the infection can spread very quickly and 300 of those people die in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, about 400 a year lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

For this reason, it is best to prevent the disease from occurring. Signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease may be confused with other infectious diseases. If your child has symptoms of meningococcal disease, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

Signs and Symptoms of Meningitis

- Headache
- Fever
- Chills
- Stiff neck
- Extreme tiredness
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Rash of purplish black-red dots or splotches
- Confusion
- Seizures

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

Vaccines can prevent approximately two-thirds of the meningococcal disease cases. There are two types of meningococcal vaccine available in the United States (MCV4 and MPSV4) that protect against four of the five most common disease-causing strains of the meningococcal bacteria.

MCV4 stands for meningococcal conjugate vaccine and MPSV4 stands for meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine. Two doses of, MCV4 are recommended for:

- All adolescents 11-18 years of age, and
- Other people at high risk 2 through 55 years of age.

MCV4 should be given to all adolescents at age 11 or 12 years, unless they have received it before. A booster dose is due at age 16 years. For adolescents who receive the first dose at age 13 through 15 years, a one-time booster dose should be given at age 16 through 18 years.

Children 2 years of age and older and adults who are at high risk for meningococcal disease should receive 2 doses spaced 2 months apart. People at high risk include individuals who:

- Do not have a spleen,
- Have terminal complement deficiencies,
- HIV infection, or
- Will be traveling to countries with high rates of meningococcal disease.

Teens and young adults age 16 through 21 years who receive(d) their first dose of MCV at 16 years of age or older do not need a booster dose.

MPSV4 protects against the same types of meningococcal bacteria as MCV4 and is indicated for use in adults over 55 years of age who are at risk for meningococcal disease.

Teenagers and young adults can also reduce their risk by taking good care of themselves, by eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep and exercise, as well as avoiding cigarettes and alcohol.

Is this vaccine required to attend school in Oklahoma?

Meningococcal vaccine is required for students who are enrolling for the first time in colleges and post-high school educational programs and who will live in dormitories or on-campus student housing. This vaccine is not required for children in elementary or high school in Oklahoma, even though it is recommended for all adolescents 11 years and older.

Is the meningococcal vaccine safe?

Yes, both types of vaccine are safe; however, there are small risks associated with any vaccine. About half of the people who receive a meningococcal vaccine will have pain and redness where the shot was given, but because the vaccine is not made from the whole bacteria, it cannot cause bloodstream infections or meningitis. A small percentage of people who get the vaccine develop

a fever. Vaccines, like all medicines, carry a risk of an allergic reaction, but this risk is very small.

A few cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a serious nervous system disorder, have been reported among people who received MCV4. However, GBS is such a rare disease that it is not possible right now to tell if the vaccine is a part of the cause or simply due to chance alone because a number of cases of GBS will occur every year even without the use of MCV4 vaccine.

Does the meningococcal vaccine work?

Yes. A single dose of MCV4 meningococcal vaccine protects about 90 percent of the people who are immunized against meningococcal disease caused by types A, C, Y, and W-135. These types cause almost two-thirds of all meningococcal disease among teenagers in the United States. It does not prevent type B, which causes about one third of the cases in teenagers.

Does the meningococcal vaccine prevent all cases of meningitis?

No, it cannot provide protection against other causes of bacterial meningitis or type B meningococcal disease. Scientists have not been able to make a vaccine that will protect against type B.

Where can I get the vaccine for my son or daughter?

If your child has health insurance, you can obtain the meningococcal vaccine from your regular healthcare provider. All county health departments in Oklahoma have the vaccine available at no charge for children 11 through 18 years of age who:

- Have no health insurance,
- Are Medicaid eligible,
- Are Native American, or
- Have health insurance that does not pay for vaccines or does not pay for meningococcal vaccine;

and for children 2 through 18 years of age who are at high risk from meningococcal disease.

Where can I find more information?

For more information, contact your healthcare provider or local county health department or visit these web sites:

National Meningitis Association at www.nmaus.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.htm>



¿Qué es la enfermedad meningocócica?

La Enfermedad Meningocócica es una enfermedad causada por la bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*, también llamada meningococo. Esta bacteria puede infectar la sangre, causando septicemia. También puede infectar la cubierta del cerebro y la médula espinal, causando meningitis..

¿Cómo se propaga la enfermedad?

La enfermedad meningocócica es propagada por contacto directo con la saliva o gotitas respiratorias de la nariz o garganta de una persona infectada.

¿Quién está en riesgo de contraer esta enfermedad?

Algunos grupos de personas tienen un riesgo más alto de contraer la enfermedad meningocócica, tal como estudiantes de primer año del colegio viviendo en dormitorios o nuevos reclutas militares viviendo en cuarteles. Otras personas con riesgo aumentado incluyen contactos de una persona con la enfermedad, personas inmunocomprometidas, personas sin bazo, y personas viajando a lugares del mundo donde la enfermedad meningocócica es más común. Exposición a humo de tabaco e infecciones respiratorias superior concurrentes también aumentan el riesgo de la enfermedad meningocócica. Los bebés están en riesgo más altos, pero tasas disminuyen después de infancia y después incrementan en adolescencia y los primeros años de edad adulta.

¿Cuáles son los síntomas?

Diez por ciento o más de las personas se cree que lleven *Neisseria meningitidis* en su nariz y garganta sin estar enfermos, se llaman "cargadores asintomáticos." De estas personas, alrededor de 1% pueden desarrollar enfermedad, que puede ser meningitis o una infección de flujo sanguínea llamada septicemia o Meningococemia. Como es descrito arriba, algunas personas pueden cargar la bacteria en su nariz o garganta y nunca enfermarse. Señales de enfermedad pueden incluir fiebre, dolor de cabeza severo, náusea, vomito, y sarpullido. Personas que desarrollan meningitis pueden tener fiebre, dolor de cabeza intenso, náusea, vomito, rigidez en el cuello, y extrema sensibilidad a la luz. Es importante buscar cuidados de un proveedor de salud médica lo más pronto posible si estos síntomas aparecen. La enfermedad meningocócica tiene un 15% de riesgo de muerte si no es tratado rápido.

¿Qué tan pronto aparecen los síntomas?

Los síntomas pueden aparecer dos a diez días después de infección, pero usualmente dentro de tres o cuatro días.

¿Cuál es el tratamiento para la enfermedad meningocócica?

Antibióticos, tal como penicilina o cefalosporina tal como ceftriaxona, son usados para tratar la enfermedad meningocócica.

¿Deben personas que han estado alrededor de una persona infectada con la enfermedad meningocócica recibir tratamiento?

Cuando la enfermedad meningocócica ocurre en una persona, solo las personas que han tenido contacto reciente con secreciones respiratorias de la persona son recomendadas para recibir antibióticos. Estos incluyen miembros del hogar, contactos íntimos, personal de salud que realizan resucitación boca a boca, amigos de la guardería, etc. Tales personas son aconsejadas a obtener una receta para antibióticos específicos (rifampina, ciprofloxacina, ceftriaxona, o azitromicina) de su doctor. El departamento de salud se pondrá en contacto con las personas que son recomendadas para recibir antibióticos, e informarles de opciones de cómo obtener antibióticos. Contactos casuales incluyendo compañeros de escuela o trabajo, o aquellos en un ambiente de fábrica no están en mayor riesgo de enfermedad cuando una persona tiene la enfermedad meningocócica. Cuando se producen grupos o brotes, el departamento de salud puede ampliar las recomendaciones para los grupos que necesitan recibir antibióticos para prevenir la posible propagación. Antibióticos no protegen personas de exposición futura a *Neisseria meningitidis*.

¿Hay vacuna para prevenir la enfermedad meningocócica?

Tres tipos de vacuna contra meningocócica son disponibles en los Estados Unidos. Son efectivos contra cuatro de los cinco tipos que causan la enfermedad meningocócica: A, C, Y, y W-135. Una vacuna adicional esta disponible para proteger contra el serotipo B, pero actualmente está autorizado sólo para los niños de alto riesgo mayores de diez años de edad. Consulte con su médico o el departamento de salud local acerca de recibir la vacuna.