

## WHAT COLLEGE STUDENTS AND PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS

Meningococcal (muh-NIN-jah-kah-kul) meningitis is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection. The disease is most commonly expressed as meningitis, an attack of the brain and spinal cord, or meningococemia, a presence of bacteria in the blood. It can result in permanent brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, organ failure, loss of limbs or death.

Certain college students have been found to be at increased risk for meningococcal meningitis. In fact, freshmen living in dormitories are found to have a sixfold increased risk for the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories, learn more about meningococcal meningitis and consider vaccination. They also recommend other college students who wish to reduce their risk for the disease can also be vaccinated.

Following are some commonly asked questions and answers about meningococcal meningitis, the risk for college students and vaccination:

### What causes meningococcal meningitis?

- Meningococcal meningitis is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, a leading cause of meningitis and/or blood poisoning in teenagers and young adults in the United States.

### How common is meningococcal meningitis?

- Meningococcal meningitis strikes about 3,000 Americans each year causing more than 300 deaths annually.
- It is estimated that 100 to 125 cases of meningococcal meningitis occur annually on college campuses and 5 to 15 students die as a result.

### How is meningococcal meningitis spread?

- Meningococcal meningitis is transmitted through air droplets and direct contact with infected persons.
- It occurs most often in late winter and early spring—at a time when most college students are away at school.

### What are the symptoms of meningococcal meningitis?

- Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis are often misdiagnosed as something less serious.
- Symptoms can resemble the flu and may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion and/or a rash.
- If not detected early, the disease can progress, often within hours of the first signs of symptoms.