

Dear Parent or Guardian:

As of July 2005 schools in Washington are required to provide information on meningococcal disease to parents or guardians of all students entering Grades 6-12.

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection of the brain (meningitis) and blood caused by a type of bacteria. Fortunately, this life-threatening infection is rare -- only about 75 people are infected each year in Washington. Adolescents and young adults are more likely to get meningococcal disease, especially those living in group settings, like college dorms.

A vaccine is available that can protect your child against the most common types of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. One dose of meningococcal vaccine is recommended for all adolescents ages 11-12 years as part of their pre-teen health check-up. The vaccine is also recommended for all adolescents ages 13 through 18 who have not previously been vaccinated. College freshmen living in dorms are at increased risk for meningococcal disease and should get vaccinated before starting college if they didn't get the vaccine at a younger age. The meningococcal vaccine is not required for school or college attendance.

Here are some other ways to prevent the spread of meningococcal disease:

- Practice good hygiene (regular hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, etc.)
- Do not share items such as eating utensils, glasses, cups, water bottles, drinks, lip gloss or toothbrushes, because they may spread meningococcal disease and other bacteria and viruses.

We encourage you to learn more about meningococcal disease and how to prevent it. More information on meningococcal disease, the vaccine, and other recommended immunizations is available on the following web sites:

Washington State Department of Health Immunization Program

Meningococcal information: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/diseases/meningitis/default.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Meningococcal vaccine information: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf

Disease information: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm

Pre-teen immunizations: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/preteens-adol.htm

College students & young adults: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/college.htm

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Vaccine Education Center

Meningococcal questions & answers: http://www.chop.edu/vaccine/images/vec_mening_tear.pdf

National Meningitis Association

www.nmaus.org