

Facts About Meningococcal Disease for Adults

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal (muh-nin-jo-cock-al) disease is a very serious bacterial infection that causes severe swelling of the protective lining around the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or infection of the bloodstream (meningococcal bacteremia). Less often, it causes arthritis or pneumonia. The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread by close, direct contact with a person who is carrying the bacteria in their nose or throat. Even with appropriate treatment, one in ten people who get meningococcal disease will die and two more will have serious permanent disabilities including brain damage, hearing loss and limb amputations.

Prevention

Meningococcal conjugate vaccine is effective at preventing meningococcal disease caused by four of the five types of bacteria that cause the majority of meningococcal disease worldwide. The vaccine can be given to anyone 2 to 55 years old. Another vaccine (the “polysaccharide vaccine”) protects against the same four types of meningococcal bacteria and is available for people over 55 years old.

The conjugate meningococcal vaccine is recommended for all adolescents 11-18 years of age, college freshmen living in dormitories and other persons 19-55 years of age who are at increased risk of meningococcal disease.

Symptoms

In its early stages, meningococcal disease symptoms can include fever, headache, body aches and a stiff neck. These symptoms may be mild and can easily be mistaken for less severe illnesses, like a cold or flu. But symptoms can progress quickly, killing an otherwise healthy young person in less than 48 hours. Other symptoms that may occur are nausea, vomiting, confusion, sleepiness, sensitivity to light and a rash (usually dark purple spots on the arms, legs or torso).

Who should get meningococcal conjugate vaccine?

- ◆ Adolescents 11-18 years of age
- ◆ College freshmen living in dormitories
- ◆ Other adults at increased risk of meningococcal disease, including : military recruits, international travelers going to certain areas where meningococcal disease is epidemic, microbiologists who may be working with *Neisseria meningitidis*, and people who have had their spleen removed (or who have non-functioning spleens) as well as other adults with certain medical conditions.

Vaccine Safety

The meningococcal conjugate vaccine is safe. Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild. The most common reactions are pain and redness at the injection site. The vaccine cannot cause meningococcal disease. Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a syndrome of muscle weakness, has been reported rarely among some people who were vaccinated with meningococcal conjugate vaccine. People for whom meningococcal vaccination is recommended but who have a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome should talk to their doctors – the meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine may be a good alternative for them..

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- FACT:** **Meningococcal conjugate vaccine is** a safe and effective vaccine licensed to prevent meningococcal disease in persons 2-55 years old.
- FACT:** The vaccine protects against four of the five main types of meningococcal bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. These four types cause 75% of cases in adults and adolescents.
- FACT:** You cannot get meningococcal disease from the vaccine.
- FACT:** The vaccine is safe and side effects after vaccination are usually minor and can include pain and redness at the injection site. There have been rare reports of severe muscle weakness occurring in association with getting this vaccine.
- FACT:** Up to 2,800 Americans get meningococcal disease every year; one in every ten will die, even with treatment.
- FACT:** Two in ten of those who survive will have serious permanent disabilities like brain damage, hearing loss and limb amputations.
- FACT:** College-bound students, particularly those who will live in dormitories, are at higher risk for this disease.
- FACT:** The bacteria are spread through close, direct contact with a person carrying the bacteria.
- FACT:** The bacteria are not spread by casual contact such as breathing air where an infected person has been.
- FACT:** Early symptoms of meningococcal disease (fever, headache, body aches and stiff neck) may be mistaken for other less serious illnesses like the common cold or flu, but meningococcal disease symptoms can progress quickly killing an otherwise healthy young person in two days or less.
- FACT:** The meningococcal conjugate vaccine is recommended for all college freshmen living in dormitories (if they have not already received it). It is recommended for other adults who are at increased risk of meningococcal disease, including military recruits, persons traveling to areas where there is more meningococcal disease, or persons with certain medical conditions.