

Planning for Prevention: Tips to Manage Meningococcal Disease Outbreaks on Campus

Meningococcal disease (meningitis) is a rare but deadly bacterial infection. In addition to the serious medical impact, even one case on a college campus can cause social anxiety and fear among students and parents, often taking up a great deal of campus resources. Serogroup B is the most common cause of meningococcal disease in US adolescents and young adults. It is also the cause of recent college outbreaks of the disease. Parents may think their college-age children are protected against meningococcal disease because they received the routinely recommended quadrivalent vaccine (ACWY) – but, that vaccine does not protect against serogroup B disease. Students may request the serogroup B vaccine from their healthcare professional. Vaccines to protect against serogroup B became available in the US in 2014. Yet, very few adolescents and young adults have received it. The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public and healthcare professionals about the causes, prevention, and treatment of infectious diseases, offers the following tips to help increase and maintain a high level of awareness about meningococcal disease and prevention through vaccination:

- Encourage all incoming and returning students to get vaccinated according to CDC and state recommendations. Take every opportunity to inform students and their parents, including welcome packets, orientation, health center visits, website updates, and social media, about vaccines available to help protect against the disease.
- Educate students, prospective students, and parents with credible information. Use resources from reliable sources, such as NFID and CDC, for access to the latest information. Links to valuable resources are available at: www.nfid.org/meningitis-toolkit.
- Evaluate resources and discuss how you would respond to a meningococcal disease case on campus.
 - Meet with relevant department heads/administrators, student and community leaders, and healthcare and local public health professionals to discuss the level of knowledge about the disease, symptoms, potential impacts on campus, and college vaccine requirements/recommendations.
 - Establish relationships with local news media so that they understand the issue, can help promote information about the disease, and can help during a crisis. Provide easy access to information on all aspects of meningococcal disease, including diagnosis, treatment, transmission, and prevention to inform current and future media coverage.
- Establish a meningococcal disease response team, including representatives from health services, communications, administration, local public health, and the local community. Encourage team members to review the recommendations in the NFID report (<http://www.nfid.org/meningococcal-b>), based on real experiences with meningococcal disease serogroup B cases/outbreaks. Meet on a regular basis to discuss how your students can best be protected.