

# MENINGOCOCCAL VACCINE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Effective June 1, 2000, Maryland law requires that an individual enrolled in an institution of higher education in Maryland who resides in on-campus student housing must be vaccinated against meningococcal disease. An individual may be exempt from this requirement if (1) the institution of higher education provides the individual or the individual's parent or guardian if the individual is a minor (under 18 years of age) detailed information on the risks associated with meningococcal disease and the availability and effectiveness of any vaccine, and (2) the individual or a minor individual's parent or guardian signs a waiver stating that the individual or the parent or guardian has received and reviewed the information provided and has chosen that the individual will not be vaccinated against meningococcal disease.



## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but life threatening illness, caused by the bacterium, *Neisseria meningitidis*. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis (an infection of the brain and spinal cord coverings) in the United States. The most severe form of the disease is meningococemia, infection of the bloodstream by this bacterium.

Deaths from meningococcal disease have occurred among Maryland college students in recent years. Students living in dormitories or residence halls are at increased risk. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene encourages meningococcal vaccination of higher education students.

About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. 10-15% of these people die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, 10% lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

## About the vaccine:

Meningococcal vaccine can be effective in preventing four types of meningococcal disease. The vaccine is not effective in preventing all types of the disease, but it does help to protect many people who might become sick if they don't get the vaccine. Drugs such as penicillin can be used to treat meningococcal infection. Still, about one out of every ten people who get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life.



A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reaction. People should not get meningococcal vaccine if they have ever had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of meningococcal vaccine. Some people who get meningococcal vaccine have mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot was given (which is usually under the skin of the upper arm). A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever. The vaccine may be given to pregnant women.

Meningococcal vaccine is available in some school health centers, travel clinics, some county health departments, and the offices of some health providers.

**Meningococcal Disease on Campus...Know Your Risk**