

Meningococcal Meningitis

Dear Parents and Student:

The state of Iowa requires that incoming students who will be residing in a campus residence hall receive information regarding the risks associated with Meningococcal disease and the effectiveness of vaccine available to prevent this disease.

On February 10, 2005, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) voted to recommend that all incoming freshmen living in dormitories be vaccinated against meningococcal disease. The American College Health Association (ACHA) issued similar immunization recommendations for all first-year students living in residence halls. The ACIP and ACHA recommendations further state that other college students under 25 years of age may choose to receive meningococcal vaccination to reduce their risk for the disease.

Meningococcal disease is contagious and progresses very rapidly. The bacteria are spread person-to-person through the air by respiratory droplets (e.g., coughing, sneezing). The bacteria can also be transmitted through direct contact with an infected person, such as oral contact with shared items like cigarettes or drinking glasses, and through kissing.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease often resemble those of the flu, making it sometimes difficult to diagnosis, and may include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and confusion. Students who notice these symptoms - in themselves, friends, or others – especially if the symptoms are unusually sudden or severe, should contact the Student Health Services or local medical center. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disabilities. 1 in 5 of those who survive will suffer from long-term side effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures or limb amputation.

Meningococcal vaccination helps to protect against 4 of the 5 most common strains of N. meningitidis. In persons 15-24 years of age, 70 to 80% of cases are caused by potentially vaccine-preventable strains. Please discuss having this vaccination with your health care provider.

For more information, visit the following web sites: www.acha.org or www.cdc.gov. Thanks for considering this recommendation.

Mary Mathiasen, RN / Director of Student Health Services

