



Mansfield University

Student Living

The College and University Vaccination Act—Senate Bill 955

College students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis. In fact, students living in residence halls are found to have a six-fold increased risk for the disease. The American College Health Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend that college students, particularly students living in residence halls, learn more about meningitis and vaccination. At least 70% of all cases of meningococcal disease in college students are vaccine preventable.

Many states have recently passed legislation mandating the meningitis vaccine for students living in residence halls. Pennsylvania has legislation stating that all residence hall students must either have the vaccination or sign a declination statement after having received information concerning the benefits of the meningitis vaccine. What is meningococcal meningitis? Meningitis is rare. But, when it strikes, this potentially fatal bacterial disease can lead to the swelling of fluid surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even death.

How is it spread? Meningococcal meningitis is spread through the air via respiratory secretions or close contact with an infected person. This can include coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing items like utensils, cigarettes and drinking glasses.

What are the symptoms? Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis often resemble the flu and can include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, lethargy, and confusion

Who is at risk? Certain college students, particularly students who live in residence halls, have been found to have an increased risk for meningococcal meningitis. Other students should also consider vaccination to reduce their risk for the disease.

Can meningitis be prevented? Yes. A safe and effective vaccine is available to protect against four of the five most common strains of the disease. The vaccine provides protection for approximately three to five years. Adverse reactions to the meningitis vaccine are mild and infrequent, consisting primarily of redness and pain at the injection site and rarely a fever. As with the vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100 percent of all susceptible individuals. It does not protect against viral meningitis.

For more information: To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, visit the Mansfield University Clinic or call (570) 662-4350. You can also visit the websites of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo and the American College Health Association, www.acha.org.