

OVERVIEW/KEY POINTS:

- As of May 31, there have been a total of 4 cases of invasive meningococcal disease associated with Princeton University.
- All four cases are caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroup (type) B.
- Although there is a vaccine to help prevent meningococcal disease, the vaccine only protects against four of the five most common strains (types)—A, C, Y and W-135. There is currently no licensed vaccine that protects against serogroup B. As such, even students who have been vaccinated with the meningococcal vaccine may still be vulnerable to infections with serogroup B. Vaccination is still recommended to prevent infection with serogroups A, C, Y and W-135 among high risk groups such as college students.
- The NJ Department of Health (NJDOH), local health officials, and Princeton University Health Services, in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), continue to work together to identify close contacts, administer prophylactic (preventative) antibiotics to close contacts, and provide recommendations for appropriate public health measures.
- Individuals should remain vigilant (have increased awareness) for signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and practice good hygiene habits.
- Contact your health care provider immediately if you experience symptoms of meningococcal disease since early diagnosis and treatment are very important.
- Healthcare providers evaluating individuals with a clinically compatible illness should have a low threshold for initiating appropriate treatment for *Neisseria meningitidis*.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease on campus and in the community?

You can help prevent the spread of illnesses by:

Covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

Cleaning your hands.

Washing your hands will help protect you against infections. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub. You should clean your hands before eating.

Practice healthy habits.

Avoid sharing utensils, water bottles or other items contaminated by saliva or respiratory secretions.

Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol intake. Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest.

DISEASE INFORMATION

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal (muh-nin-jo-cok-ul) disease is a severe infection of the blood or the meninges (the covering of the brain and spinal cord). When the infection is in the blood, it is called meningococemia (me·nin·go·coc·ce·mi·a). When the infection is in the meninges, it is called meningococcal meningitis. Both of these infections are caused by a bacterium (germ) called *Neisseria meningitidis*.

The bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* has at least 13 different serogroups (types). Five of these serogroups, A, B, C, Y, and W-135, cause almost all invasive disease.

What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Because early symptoms may be mild and similar to those of less serious viral illnesses like a common cold, it would not be unusual for people to delay seeking treatment. The early symptoms of meningococcal disease include fever, body aches, headaches, and feeling very tired or sleepy. Other symptoms that may occur are stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and sensitivity to light.

How serious is meningococcal disease?

Left untreated, the disease can progress rapidly, often within hours of the first symptoms, and can lead to shock, death or serious complications, including hearing loss, brain damage, kidney disease or limb amputations. Seek medical care immediately if you experience two or more of these symptoms concurrently, or if the symptoms are unusually sudden or severe.

How do people get meningococcal disease?

The bacteria are spread from person to person through saliva (spit) or other respiratory secretions. You must be in close contact with a sick person's secretions in order for the bacteria to spread. Close contact includes activities such as:

- living in the same household or sleeping in the same dwelling
- kissing
- sharing eating utensils or food
- sharing drinks
- sharing cigarettes
- uncovered face-to-face sneezing or coughing

The bacteria are NOT SPREAD by casual contact activities like being in the same work or school room as the sick person, or handling books or other items that the sick person has touched. The bacteria cannot live outside the body for very long, so the disease is not as easily transmitted.

If I am exposed to meningococcal disease, how long will it take to develop symptoms?

Most people who are exposed to meningococcal disease will develop symptoms from 1 to 10 days.

Is there medication available to prevent infection?

Sometimes *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria spread to other people who have had close or lengthy contact with a patient with meningococcal disease. People in the same household, roommates, or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (saliva) (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of getting the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with meningococcal disease should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease. This is known as prophylaxis. Casual contact as might occur in a regular classroom; office or factory setting is not usually significant enough to cause concern.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Where can I get additional information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
<http://www.state.nj.us/health/lh/directory/lhdselectcounty.shtml>
- NJ Department of Health
<http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/meningo/index.shtml>
http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/meningococcal_faqs.pdf
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html>