



## MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION

### **OVERVIEW/KEY POINTS:**

- As of March 18, 2014, the NJ Department of Health (NJDOH) is aware of 9 cases of invasive meningococcal disease associated with Princeton University. The ninth case is a female student from Drexel University who had close contact with students from Princeton University about a week before becoming ill.
- All cases have been 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 serogroups (types)—A, C, Y and W-135. There is currently no vaccine licensed in the United States that protects against serogroup B.
- A high percentage of Princeton University undergraduates and eligible graduate students received two doses of the investigational serogroup B vaccine as part of a recent vaccination effort at Princeton University. Those who have received the investigational vaccine have likely protected themselves from getting sick (there have been no new cases among Princeton University students since the vaccination campaign began on December 9, 2013). However, vaccinated individuals may still be able to carry the bacteria in their throats, which could infect others through close contact.
- Individuals should remain vigilant (have increased awareness) for signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and should continue to practice good hygiene habits to prevent the spread of the bacteria.
- 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 or your sleeve 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 (muh-nin-jo-cok-see-me-ah). 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*.

### **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 symptoms of meningococcal disease.

### **How do people get meningococcal disease?**

The bacteria are spread from person to person through saliva (spit) or other respiratory secretions. The infectious period for meningococcal disease is considered to be from 10 days before the person got sick to 1 day after he or she starts on antibiotics. This means that people who were in **close** contact with the sick person during this time are at higher than average risk to get meningococcal disease.

You must be in close contact with a sick person's secretions like saliva (spit) 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 become ill develop symptoms 1 to 10 days after exposure to someone with meningococcal disease.

### **Is there medication available to prevent infection?**

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.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Where can I get additional information?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department  
<http://www.princetonnj.gov/health/index.html>  
<http://www.state.nj.us/health/lh/directory/lhdselectcounty.shtml>
- NJ Department of Health  
<http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/meningo/index.shtml>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html>
- Princeton University  
<http://web.princeton.edu/sites/emergency/meningitis.html>

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