

## **Meningococcal Disease Information**

This notice is to inform students and families as required by Wisc. Stat. sec. 118.07(3) about the dangers of meningococcal disease, commonly known as bacterial meningitis, a rare but potentially fatal infection that can occur among teenagers and college students. While meningococcal disease is rare and difficult to contract, it is very serious. There are vaccines that may help to prevent this infection.

Meningococcal bacteria can potentially be transmitted through close contact with an infected person through direct contact with respiratory and/or oral secretions from an infected person (for example, through sharing drinking containers or kissing). Teenagers and college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease compared to the general population. Meningococcal disease can be misdiagnosed as something less serious, because early symptoms like high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck, are similar to those of common viral illnesses. The disease can progress rapidly and can cause death or permanent disability within 48 hours of initial symptoms.

The incidence of meningococcal disease has decreased in the United States since the peak in the late 1990's. There are five strains of *N. meningitidis*: A, B, C, W, and Y that cause the most disease worldwide. Three of these strains (B, C, and Y) cause most of the illness seen in the United States.

Keeping up-to-date with recommended immunizations is the best defense against meningococcal disease. There are several vaccines that protect against the different types of *N. meningitidis* bacteria. Three vaccines protect against four of the five types (A, C, Y, and W-135). The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends children get their first dose of these meningococcal vaccines when they are between 11 and 12 years and get a booster dose when they are 16 years of age. Two vaccines protect against the fifth type of *N. meningitidis* bacteria, strain B. The ACIP recommends this vaccine be given to people aged 16-23 years. The ideal age to vaccinate is between 16 and 18 years, to provide protection when individuals are at greatest risk of getting meningococcal disease.

For more information about meningococcal disease and immunization, please feel free to contact the school nurse.