

Whitworth University Health Center

IMMUNIZATION RECOMMENDATION URGES COLLEGE FRESHMEN LIVING IN RESIDENCE HALLS TO BE VACCINATED AGAINST MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Health Center recommends that all incoming freshmen living in residence hall receive Menactra Vaccine at least two week prior to arrival on campus

Washington State Law requires that students be informed of availability of vaccine. Immunization experts have issued a new vaccination recommendation for meningococcal disease stating that all first-year students living in residence halls should be immunized against meningococcal disease, a rare, but potentially fatal, bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis.

This recommendation, issued by the American College Health Association (ACHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), strengthens previous recommendations, which until now only encouraged health care providers to educate college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories (or residence halls) about meningitis.

ACHA and CDC recommendations further state that other college students under the age of 25 years who wish to reduce their risk of infection may choose to be vaccinated. The CDC also recommends vaccination for young adolescents at the pre-adolescent doctor visit (11 to 12 years old), and for those who have not previously been vaccinated, before entering high school at about age 15.

These new recommendations are based on the recent licensure of a reformulated meningococcal vaccine, which has the potential to provide longer duration of protection against four of the five strains (or types) of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease – types A, C, Y, and W-135.

College students living in residence halls are more likely to acquire meningococcal disease than the general college population, due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations, bar patronage, active or passive smoking, irregular sleep patterns, and sharing of personal items.

Meningococcal disease is a potentially deadly infection, and the immunization recommendation for first-year students living in residence halls, along with the availability of a meningococcal vaccine that may provide longer duration of protection, will help college health professionals protect college students against this disease.

Every year, meningococcal disease strikes 1,400 to 3,000 Americans and is responsible for approximately 150 to 300 deaths. Adolescents and young adults account for nearly 30 percent of all cases of meningitis in the United States. Approximately 100 to 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses each year, and five to 15 students will die as a result. Meningococcal infection is contagious and progresses very rapidly. It can easily be misdiagnosed as the flu, and, if not treated early, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disabilities. One in five of those who survive will suffer long-term side effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures, or limb amputation.