



Student Health Services

Dear Students and Parents:

Meningococcal meningitis is a rare but devastating illness in which an aggressive bacterium (*Neisseria meningitidis*, the “meningococcus”) infects the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. 10-14% of patients die, and survivors often sustain significant brain injury (causing learning disabilities, deafness or seizures) and amputations.

Infection *is* treatable with antibiotics, but can develop so quickly that it may be too late by the time a diagnosis is clear. Symptoms are initially flu-like – aches, fever and chills – but progress to high fevers, severe headache and neck stiffness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and a characteristic blotchy rash.

Why is this an issue at universities? Some students (freshmen, students living in residence halls, *and especially freshmen living in residence halls*) are at *increased risk* of contracting this illness (about 4.6 cases per 100,000 students per year). Four students developed meningococcal meningitis at Kansas universities in 2003-4.

Meningococcal disease is spread in respiratory secretions - by coughing, kissing or sharing drinks - especially in situations where many people live in close quarters. Smoking (including secondhand smoke) adds to the risk.

Fortunately, vaccines exist that can *prevent* most of these infections, and many universities now require meningitis immunization for certain students. *The Center for Disease Control recommends meningitis immunization for all freshmen living in residence halls. For this reason, Washburn University requires meningococcal immunization (or waiver thereof) of all students living in University housing.*

Vaccine is available at many doctors’ offices, local health departments, and at WU Student Health Services. We stock Menactra, expected to confer >7 years’ immunity, for about \$95, payable at time of service by cash or check. Student Health Services are open weekdays from 8-1 and 2-4:30, and no appointments are necessary for shots.

We will have a shot clinic in the residence halls on Move-in Day, though we *strongly recommend* that students come in for shots during BluePrint or earlier in the summer. Please call us, or e-mail <wudoc@washburn.edu> with any questions.

Sincerely,

Iris P. Gonzalez, MD, Director