What You Need to Know About Meningococcal Vaccine

According to Missouri Law (RSMo 174.335), before moving into a Missouri State University residence hall a student (or parent, if the student is under 18 years of age) is required to sign a record acknowledging that they have either: 1) Elected to receive the meningococcal vaccine and, therefore, will present a vaccination record to the University (attach record to this form or provide the record before checking into the residence halls); OR 2) Received detailed written information regarding the risks associated with meningococcal disease and the availability and effectiveness of the meningococcal vaccine, and have elected not to receive the vaccine with full knowledge of the associated risks.

The following information has been taken from the CDC website and is provided for your convenience. On the back of this sheet, you will find a meningococcal disease vaccination/waiver form. You must complete this form and return it to Residence Life and Services before you will be allowed to move into the residence halls at Missouri State University.

What is meningococcal disease?
Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by bacteria. It is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in youths 2-18 years old in the United States.

Meningitis is an infection of the brain and spinal cord coverings. Meningococcal disease can also cause blood infections. About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. 10%-15% of these people die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics.

Of those who live, another 10% lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. But it is most common in infants less than 1 year of age, international travelers, and people with certain medical conditions.

College freshmen, particularly those who live in dormitories, have a slightly increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal vaccine can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease.
This includes 2 of the 3 types most common in the United States and a type which is the main cause of meningococcal epidemics in Africa.

Meningococcal vaccine cannot prevent all types of the disease, but it does help to protect many people who might become sick if they don’t get the vaccine. Drugs such as penicillin can be used to treat meningococcal infection.

Still, about 1 out of every 10 people who get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life. This is why it is important that people with the highest risk for meningococcal disease get the vaccine.

Who should get meningococcal vaccine and when?
• U.S. Military recruits
• People who might be affected during an outbreak of certain types of meningococcal disease.
• Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common, such as West Africa.
• Anyone who has a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed.
• Anyone who has terminal complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder).

The vaccine should also be considered for:
• Some laboratory workers who are routinely exposed to the meningococcal bacteria.
• The vaccine may also be given to college students who choose to be vaccinated. College freshmen, especially those who live in dormitories, and their parents should discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with their health care providers.

Meningococcal vaccine is usually not recommended for children under 2 years of age, but under special circumstances it may be given to infants as young as 3 months (the vaccine does not work as well in very young children). Ask your health care provider for details.

How many doses?
• For people 2 years of age and over: 1 dose (Sometimes an additional dose is recommended for people who continue to be at high risk. Ask your provider.)
• For children 3 months to 2 years of age who need the vaccine: 2 doses, 3 months apart

What are the risks?
A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of meningococcal vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small. Getting the meningococcal vaccine is much safer than getting the disease.

Mild problems
Some people who get a meningococcal vaccine have mild side effects such as redness or pain where the shot was given. These symptoms usually last for 1-2 days. A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever.

How can I learn more?
• Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
• Call your local or state health department’s immunization program.
• Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  o Call 1-800-232-2522 (English)
  o Call 1-800-232-0233 (Español)
• Visit the American College Health Association website at: http://www.acha.org/topics/meningitis.cfm
• View the CDC’s fact sheet on meningococcal disease online at: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/mening.html
• Visit Missouri State University’s Taylor Health and Wellness Center website at: http://health.missouristate.edu/
• Visit the National Immunization Program website at: www.cdc.gov/vaccines
• Visit CDC’s Travelers’ Health website at: www.cdc.gov/travel
• Visit the National Center for Infectious Disease meningococcal disease website at: http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html