

## MENINGITIS INFORMATION

College students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis. In fact, first-year students living in residence halls are found to have a six-fold increased risk for the disease. The American College Health Association recommends that college students, particularly first-year students living in university housing, learn more about meningitis and vaccination. At least 70% of all cases of meningococcal disease in college students are vaccine preventable.

On July 28, 2002 the Pennsylvania Governor signed legislation (Senate Bill 955) which requires that all students residing in university housing either have the vaccine or sign a declination statement after review of written information concerning the benefits of receiving the meningitis vaccine.

- **What is meningococcal meningitis?** Meningitis is rare – but when it strikes, this potentially fatal bacterial disease can lead to swelling of membranes surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation, and even death.
- **How is it spread?** Meningococcal meningitis is spread through the air via respiratory secretions or close contact with an infected person. This can include coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing items such as utensils, cigarettes and drinking glasses.
- **What are the symptoms?** Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis often resemble influenza and can include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, lethargy, and confusion.
- **Who is at risk?** Certain college students, particularly first-year students who live in residence halls, have been found to have an increased risk for meningococcal meningitis.
- **Can meningitis be prevented?** Yes. A safe and effective vaccine is available to protect against Groups A, C, Y, and W-135, which account for 60 – 70% of all cases in the college age group; the vaccine does not protect against Group B, which accounts for 35 – 40% of illness in college students.
- **For more information:** To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, visit the Student Health Service or call 570-577-1401. Information is also available on:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo)

The American College Health Association website: [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org)