

~An Important Note From Student Health Services~

Dear Student and Parents,

As Campus Nurse at our university, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis, and a recommendation from the Center of Disease Control (CDC).

On October 20, 1999, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend that college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories and residence halls, be educated about meningitis and the benefits of vaccination. The panel based its recommendation on recent studies showing that college students, particularly freshmen living in dormitories, have a six fold increased risk for meningitis. Recent data obtained also suggests certain social behaviors such as alcohol consumption and exposure to passive and active smoking may increase students' risk for contracting the disease. The recommendation further states that information about the disease and vaccination is appropriate for other undergraduate students who also wish to reduce their risk for the disease.

Meningitis is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to swelling of the fluid 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.

Cases of meningitis among teens and young adults 15-24 years of age (the age of most college students) have more than doubled since 1991. The disease now strikes about 3,000 Americans each year and claims about 300 lives. Between 100-125 meningitis cases occur on college and university campuses and as many as 15 students will die from the disease.

Vaccines are available that protect against four types of the bacteria that causes meningitis in the United States - type A, C, Y and W-135. These types account for nearly two-thirds of meningitis cases among college and university students. Memomune and Menactra are available and the side effects of the vaccination are minimal, the most prevalent consisting of pain and redness at the site of injection. It is important to note that this vaccination is effective on 85% of the strains of meningitis, but it is ineffective on the strain of bacteria that causes 30% of college and university cases, and does not prevent the spread of the disease.

I encourage you and your family to learn more about meningitis and the vaccines. For more information, please feel free to contact our health service and/or consult your physician. To find out more about this disease and the immunization, you can access information on the following web site address: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo> or <http://www.acha.org>. My recommendation, if you desire the immunization of Memomune or Menactra for your student, is to get this prior to coming to Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

Sincerely,

Denise Smith, R.N.
Student Health Services