

Meningococcal vaccine

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

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid and membranes surrounding the brain and the spinal cord. Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections, which can cause the victim to go rapidly into severe cardiovascular shock.

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 11-19% 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 one year of age, people with certain medical conditions, such as lack of a spleen, and young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years. This young adult risk period peaks at 18-19 years, and is even higher for those living in crowded conditions, such as college dormitories or barracks.

Meningococcal infections can be treated with drugs such as penicillin. Still, about 1 out of every 10 people who get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life. For teens and young adults who get the disease, the risk of death is even higher- about 1 out of 6. This is why *preventing* the disease through use of meningococcal vaccine is important for people at highest risk.