

## ***MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION FOR PARENTS***

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The School District of La Crosse would like to inform you about the dangers of meningococcal disease, commonly known as bacterial meningitis, a rare but potentially fatal infection that can occur among teenagers and college students. While meningococcal disease is rare and difficult to contract, it is very serious. There is now a vaccine that may help to prevent this infection.

Meningococcal bacteria can potentially be transmitted through direct contact with respiratory and/or oral secretions from an infected person (for example, through sharing drinking containers or kissing). Teenagers and college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases every year. Meningococcal disease can be misdiagnosed as something less serious, because early symptoms like high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting and stiff neck, are similar to those of common viral illnesses. The disease can progress rapidly and can cause death or permanent disability within 48 hours of initial symptoms.

Up to 83 percent of all cases among teens and college students may potentially be prevented through immunization, the most effective way to prevent this disease. A meningococcal vaccine is available that protects against four out of five strains of bacterium that cause meningococcal disease in the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical organizations recommend that all 11-12 year olds should be vaccinated with meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4). A booster shot is recommended for teens at age 16 to continue providing protection when their risk for meningococcal disease is highest. Teens who received MCV4 for the first time at age 13 through 15 years will need a one-time booster dose at 16 through 18 years of age. If a teenager missed getting the vaccine altogether, they should ask the doctor about getting it now, especially if they are about to move into a college dorm or military barracks.

For more information please feel free to contact your school nurse at your child's school or visit the following websites to learn more about meningococcal disease, vaccine information, and public health resources.

- A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Meningitis Fact Sheet available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/index.html>
- National Association of School Nurses, *Voices of Meningitis*: <http://www.voicesofmeningitis.org>
- A list of local Wisconsin public health departments and contact information: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/localhealth/index.htm>

Other organizations' meningococcal meningitis information is available:

- American Academy of Pediatrics: <http://www.aap.org>
- National Meningitis Association: <http://www.nmaus.org/>

Sincerely,

School District Nurses