



MENINGITIS INFORMATION & VACCINATION WAIVER

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. People sometimes refer to it as spinal meningitis. Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Knowing whether meningitis is caused by a virus or bacterium is important because the severity of illness and the treatment differ. Viral meningitis is generally less severe and resolves without specific treatment, while bacterial meningitis can be quite severe and may result in brain damage, hearing loss, learning disability, or death. For bacterial meningitis, it is also important to know which strain of bacteria is causing the meningitis because antibiotics can prevent some types from spreading and infecting other people. *Neisseria meningitidis* (also called meningococcal meningitis) is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningitis?

Common Triad of symptoms: high fever, headache, and stiff neck. These symptoms can develop over several hours, or they may take 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, skin rash, discomfort looking into light, confusion, and sleepiness.

How is meningitis diagnosed?

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If symptoms occur, the patient should see a doctor immediately. The diagnosis is usually made in the laboratory from a sample of spinal fluid. The spinal fluid is obtained by performing a spinal tap, in which a needle is inserted into an area in the lower back where fluid in the spinal canal is readily accessible. Test results from the spinal fluid can identify if the cause is viral or bacterial and, if the latter, may help determine the selection of antibiotics most effective in treatment.

Can meningitis be treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease. Appropriate antibiotic treatment of most common types of bacterial meningitis should reduce the risk of dying from meningitis to below 15%, although the risk is higher among the elderly.

Is meningitis contagious?

Yes, bacterial meningitis is highly contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, kissing). Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been. However, sometimes the bacteria that cause meningitis have spread to other people who have had close or prolonged contact with a patient with meningitis. People in the same household or day-care center, or anyone sharing a bathroom or having direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of acquiring the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with meningitis caused by *N. meningitidis* should receive antibiotics immediately to prevent them from getting the disease.

Are there vaccines against meningitis?

Yes, there are vaccines that protect against some strains of *N. meningitidis* but there are no vaccines to protect against viral forms. The vaccine against *N. meningitidis* is sometimes used to control outbreaks of some types of meningococcal meningitis in the United States. Meningitis cases should be reported to state or local health departments to assure follow-up of close contacts and recognize outbreaks. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all people at risk should receive one dose of the conjugate vaccine (Menactra) whenever possible. This is particularly true for college students who are under the age of 25 and live in close quarters with others or someone who has had his/her spleen removed; these are two groups who have an increased risk of acquiring meningococcal infection relative to other persons their age.

To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, please contact your physician or visit the CDC web site at www.cdc.gov and/or the FIU Student Health Services web site at: studenthealth.fiu.edu.

WAIVER OF LIABILITY:

I have read the information above pertaining to meningitis. I understand the risks involved and I decline to receive the meningitis vaccine.

Last Name

First Name

Date of Birth

Panther I.D.

Signature of student (or Name and Signature of parent/legal guardian, if under 18 years of age)

Date