

Meningitis Parent Letter

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

Indiana State Law IC 20-30-5-18 requires that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of all students about meningitis and the vaccines available to prevent one type of this serious illness at the beginning of each school year.

Infections caused by this bacteria are serious, and may lead to death. Symptoms of an infection with *Neisseria meningitidis* may include a high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, confusion and a rash. This disease can become severe very quickly and often leads to deafness, mental retardation, loss of arms or legs, and even death. The bacteria can mainly be spread from person to person through the exchange of nose and throat secretions. This can occur through coughing, kissing, and sneezing. The bacteria 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 *Neisseria meningitidis*. People in the same household or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of getting the infection.

There are two vaccines (Menactra and Menveo) that can prevent most cases of meningitis caused by this bacteria in people over the age of 9 months. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against this disease for all children 11-18 years of age. CDC recommends vaccination of children with the meningococcal vaccine at 11 or 12 years old, with a booster dose at 16 years old. Children ages 9 months-10 years old who have sickle cell anemia or problems with their immune systems should also receive the vaccine. One dose of meningococcal vaccine is required for students in grades 6 – 12.

This is a legal requirement (Indiana Administrative Code 410 IAC 1-1-1). All students entering grades 6-12 need to have a record from the child's doctor indicating the vaccine was given or a record of this immunization in the state immunization registry (CHIRP) prior to the start of the school year. Many local health departments and private healthcare providers offer this vaccine. Please contact your health care provider for specific instructions regarding your child.