OVERVIEW OF MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS

Who is at risk?
Meningococcal Meningitis is an acute bacterial infection that strikes nearly 1,500 Americans each year. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to the disease, accounting for nearly 15 percent of all cases in the U.S. A recent study found 11% who are infected will die, and of those who survive, up to 20% will experience permanent disability.

What are symptoms?
Symptoms include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. In later stages, a rash may appear. Adolescents and young adults should seek medical attention immediately if they notice unusually sudden or severe symptoms of the disease.

Meningococcal disease, although rare, is devastating because early symptoms resemble the flu, making it difficult to recognize. However, unlike the flu, the disease can progress rapidly and within hours of initial symptoms, may cause hearing loss, brain damage, limb amputation and even death.

How is Meningococcal Meningitis Spread?
Meningococcal bacteria are transmitted through the air via droplets of respiratory secretions and direct contact with the persons infected with the disease. This can include coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing items like utensils, and drinking glasses.

How can Meningococcal Meningitis be prevented?
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation routine vaccination with meningococcal conjugate vaccine:
- Initial dose 11-12 years of age
- Booster dose: 16 years of age
- If initial dose given age 13-15 years: booster dose at 16-18 years of age
- If initial dose given after age 16 years, no booster dose required

College freshmen living in dormitories are at a higher risk for meningococcal disease compared to other people of the same age. Additionally, CDC states all other adolescents and college students wishing to reduce their risk may elect to be immunized if not previously vaccinated. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American College Health Association also supports these recommendations.

The Meningococcal Meningitis Vaccine offers protection against certain strains of Neisseria Meningitis. The meningitis vaccine, Menactra, has recently been approved for use among persons aged 11 to 55 years. Menomune is another meningitis vaccine that has been quite effective in reducing the rates of the disease among certain populations. Meningitis vaccines are available through your family physician, clinic, and the IWU Health Center.

The following are Web sites that provide more information about meningococcal disease and immunization:
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/risk-community
- Adult Vaccination, http://www.adultvaccination.org