

Meningococcal Disease in School Age Children

Indiana State Law IC 20-30-5-18 requires that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of students about meningitis and the vaccine available to prevent this serious illness.

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid surrounding a person's spinal cord or brain. It can be caused by a virus or it can be due to a bacterial infection. Viral meningitis is generally less severe and resolves without specific treatment or long-term effects. Bacterial meningitis can be very severe or even deadly. It may result in brain damage, hearing loss or learning disabilities as well as death. Early treatment of bacterial meningitis with antibiotics is essential for recovery from this disease.

Symptoms of both types of meningitis include high fever, headache and stiff neck in anyone over the age of two years. These symptoms may occur very suddenly or may develop over 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort when looking at bright lights, confusion or sleepiness. As the disease progresses, patients may have seizures.

Some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions such as coughing or kissing. Individuals who have direct contact with a person who has meningitis may be at risk of contracting the disease. There is now a vaccine (Menactra) that can prevent most cases of bacterial meningitis in people over age two.

Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, one dose of Menactra **will be required** for students in **grades 6-12**. All students entering grade 6-12 will need to have a record of this immunization submitted to Burriss at the beginning of the school year, August 2010.

For further information about meningococcal disease visit the websites of the following organizations:

The Indiana State Department of Health
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
The Indiana Department of Education Student Services, School Health

Thank you,
Linda Gray RN MA
Burriss School Nurse