

Dear Parent(s):

As Director of the Student Health Center at Marymount College, I am writing to inform you about the meningococcal disease, a rare, but potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis and a new immunization recommendation that may affect your college-bound student.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the American College Health Association (ACHA) have approved new recommendations that urge all first-year students living in residence halls to be immunized against the meningococcal disease. The ACIP and ACHA recommendations further state that other college students under 25 years of age, who choose to reduce their risk for the disease, may choose to be vaccinated.

Although Marymount College does not require students to be immunized against meningitis for admission to the college, we highly recommend that all students receive the *Menactra* conjugate vaccine, a reformulated meningococcal vaccine ("conjugate") that has the potential to provide longer duration of protection against four of the five strains (or types) of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease— types A, C, Y, and W-135.

The meningococcal disease strikes 1,400 to 3,000 Americans each year and is responsible for approximately 150 to 300 deaths. Adolescents and young adults account for nearly 30 percent of all cases of meningitis in the United States. In addition, approximately 100 to 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses each year, and five to 15 students die as a result. Meningococcal infection is contagious and progresses very rapidly. It can easily be misdiagnosed as the flu, and if not treated early, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disabilities. One in five of those who survive, suffer from long-term side effects, such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures or limb amputation.

Due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations, bar patronage, active or passive smoking, irregular sleep patterns and sharing of personal items, college students living in residence halls are at the highest risk to acquire meningitis than the general college population.

For more information, please feel to contact the Student Health Center and/or consult your student's physician. You can also find information about the disease and immunization by visiting the ACHA website at www.acha.org/meningitis and the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_meningitis.htm.

Sincerely,

Judith Hotchkiss, R.N., C.
Student Health Center, Director