

## Need More Information?

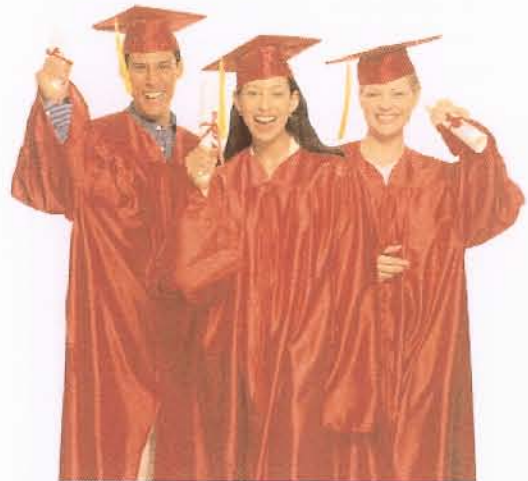
Call your private doctor, your college student health services, or the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Vaccine Preventable Disease Program at 609-588-7512. Access the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services on the web at <http://nj.gov/health/cd/vpdphome.htm> for additional information.



Richard J. Codey  
Acting Governor



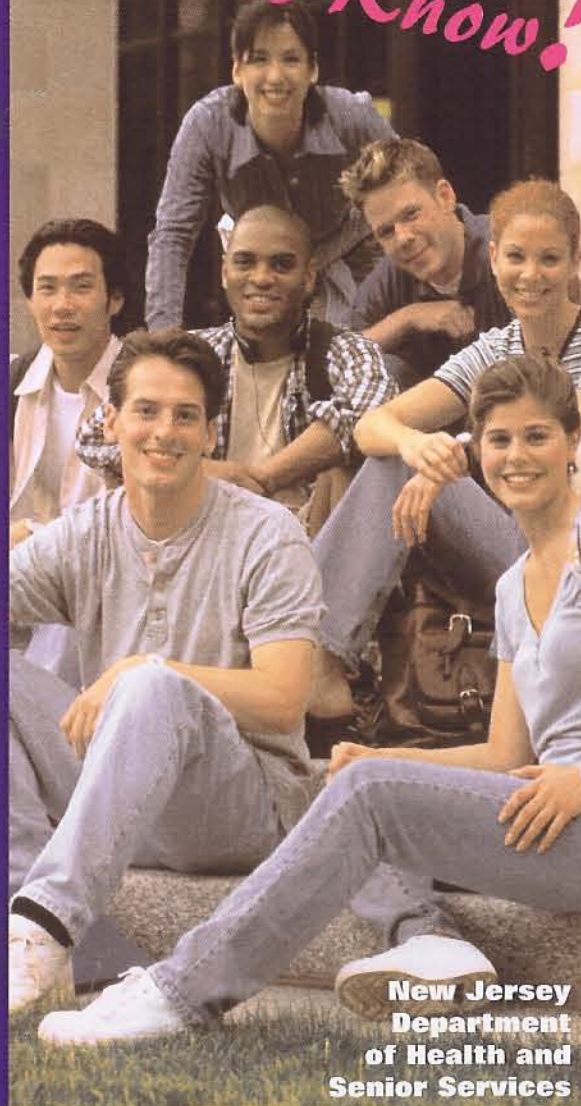
Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D.  
Commissioner



Additional copies of this brochure can be downloaded at the Department of Health and Senior Services website <http://nj.gov/health/cd/vpdphome.htm>

# Meningococcal Meningitis

What You Need to Know!



New Jersey  
Department  
of Health and  
Senior Services

## What is Meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of a person's spinal cord fluid and the fluid surrounding the brain.

## What Causes Meningitis Infections?



There are two major types of meningitis. The most common is viral meningitis, which can be caused by a variety of viruses. While viral meningitis may be a serious illness, people usually recover completely in several days. The other type, bacterial meningitis, is caused by several kinds of bacteria. The most serious is *Neisseria meningitidis*, which causes meningococcal meningitis. Bacterial meningitis is rare, but its effects are more serious than viral meningitis, and can cause death. Laboratory testing of spinal fluid ordered by a doctor is necessary to tell the difference between the two types.

## How Does Meningitis Spread?

Most cases of meningitis occur sporadically or as individual cases without apparent connection to any case or person. Occasionally, meningitis can be spread from person to person through close personal contact, such as kissing or sharing items such as drinking glasses. It is **not** spread by casual contact or by breathing the same air as a person with meningitis.



## Who Is At Risk of Getting Meningococcal Meningitis?

**Meningococcal meningitis occurs randomly across all age groups and anyone can get this disease.**

- It is common in infants or older people with weakened immune systems.
- Studies indicate that college freshmen and military recruits living in barracks have an increased risk of getting meningococcal meningitis compared to other populations.
- Other people at increased risk include travelers visiting areas of the world where the disease occurs much more frequently than in the United States, and people who are close contacts of a person currently ill with meningococcal meningitis.
- In New Jersey, less than 100 cases occur each year.



## What Are the Symptoms of Meningococcal Meningitis?

The most common symptoms of meningococcal meningitis are:

- **high fever**
- **severe headaches**
- **stiff neck**
- **confusion**
- **nausea**
- **vomiting**
- **lethargy and/or rashes**

When these symptoms occur, a physician should be consulted as soon as possible because **this disease can progress rapidly with tragic consequences in a few hours unless appropriate antibiotic treatment is begun.**



## Can Meningococcal Meningitis Be Treated?

- Meningococcal meningitis, caused by bacteria, can be treated by your doctor with prescribed antibiotics. Medication is only effective if it is started shortly after the symptoms begin.
- No treatment is available for viral meningitis.

## How Can Meningococcal Meningitis Be Prevented?

- The best way to prevent this disease especially if one is at increased risk of exposure, is by receiving the meningococcal vaccine.
- The vaccine provides protection against 4 of 5 major types of bacterial meningococcal infection.
- For adults, at least one dose of vaccine is necessary to provide protection against the most common types of bacterial meningococcal infection in the United States.
- Booster doses of vaccine every 3-5 years may be recommended by your doctor.
- The vaccine is licensed by the FDA and is safe and effective with only mild and infrequent side effects, such as local pain where the shot is given.

## Is Meningococcal Vaccine Required for School or College Entry?

In July 2005, as a result of P.L.2003, c. 284, s.2 the New Jersey Public Health Council formerly adopted N.J.A.C. 8:57-6 Higher Education Immunization to include meningococcal meningitis vaccination for college freshmen. This amendment requires any new student entering a 4-year college or university for the first time, residing in a campus dormitory receive meningococcal vaccine as a condition of attendance.

## Where is the Vaccine Available?

Pediatricians and other private physicians can obtain meningococcal vaccine for their patients. Many college student health services also administer this vaccine to their students.

