

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Meningitis

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What things can I do to protect myself against Meningitis?

First, obtain the vaccine to assist your immune in preparing to fight these bacteria if you get exposed. Second, limit your exposure to the bacteria in the first place. At parties and gatherings, don't share drinks, food, cigarettes, utensils, etc. with other people.

What options do I have with respect to obtaining the vaccination?

Students who are under 19 years of age may call the Lafayette Office of Public Health (262-5616) for availability and appointment. All other students may call the Student Health Services (482-5464) for information on the availability and cost in the Acadiana area. The Student Health Service does not administer this vaccine at this time.

I had the vaccination about 3 years ago – am I still protected?

Prior to last year, the vaccine used for meningitis was only effective for 3-5 years. However, a new vaccine is now available that may last as long as 8 years. You should check with your records or your doctor to determine which vaccine you have taken.

Who is at risk for catching Meningitis?

Everybody has a certain amount of risk. The bacterium that starts this illness exists in a good amount of the population. For some reason, in a small percentage of these people, this bacteria mutates and becomes virulent. This then causes the person to be sick. Spreading these virulent bacteria can cause others to be sick through intimate contact and sharing saliva.

Meningococcal Meningitis is spread orally through intimate contact. Things like sharing drinking cups, eating the same food, kissing, and sharing cigarettes can cause the bacteria to spread from one person to another. Other potential risk factors can be smoking or a recent respiratory infection. Meningococcal Meningitis is not an airborne transmitted illness.

If a case of meningitis is discovered on campus, is it safe for me to be on campus and co-mingling with other students?

Yes. The organisms responsible for this illness can only survive minutes outside of the human body. Being in the same class, walking in the vicinity, or even living with an infected person is not enough to spread this illness. The spread of this illness requires close intimate contact involving the sharing of saliva for survival.

What other tips can you offer me?

The University can't stress enough the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Look over these important tips:

- Eat a balanced diet – the food pyramid has recently changed. Check it out at www.mypyramid.gov.

- If you smoke, try to quit. If you don't smoke - don't start. Good help with smoking cessation programs is available at the American Lung Association website, www.lungusa.org.
- Exercise regularly – try to increase your heart rate for 30 minutes at least 3 times per week. Our recreational and intramural facilities at Bourgeois Hall are great for this and there free for students, faculty, and staff!
- Get plenty of sleep – studies show that people with regularly charged batteries tend to be healthier, more productive, and successful.
- If you are sexually active, educate yourself on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). A good resource for this is the Center for Disease Control (CDC) – check it out at www.cdc.gov/std.