

Is college life in your future?



If so, talk with your doctor about a vaccine to prevent meningococcal *meningitis* disease.

Meningitis is a **serious, potentially fatal illness** caused by bacteria. College students living in dormitories are at increased risk of contracting this disease. Symptoms may resemble the flu but progress rapidly and can often **cause death within two days**. For those who survive, long term effects can include brain damage, seizures, hearing loss or limb amputations.

Meningitis is **contagious** and is **spread through air droplets and direct contact** with infected persons. It can be spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, or shared items like a drinking glass, lip balm, utensils or cigarettes. Vaccination can prevent most cases of the disease and the vaccine is a covered benefit, paid for by most major insurance companies and Medicaid.

College lifestyle factors which can increase your risk of being infected include:

- Crowded living conditions (dorm life)
- Living with students from geographically diverse areas
- Irregular sleep habits

Meningitis is often misdiagnosed because its **early signs are much like those of the flu or migraines**. Symptoms may include sudden high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. If any of these symptoms are present and are unusually sudden and severe, **seek medical attention immediately**.

Don't let meningitis stop you from enjoying college life and obtaining your goals, as it did for Julia Harrison. Julia was a graduate from East Chapel Hill High School who died suddenly from meningococcal disease during her sophomore year at Tulane University in November 2001.

Talk to your doctor about meningococcal vaccination, and do it before you head off to college. Although getting a vaccination might sound unpleasant, remember it only hurts for a minute and it results in protection from a potentially life-threatening disease.

For more information, please visit www.immunize.nc.gov.

