

TO: All Residence Hall Students  
FROM: Office of Residence Life  
RE: Required Medical Information Update

Please complete and return to the Gordon Village Student Housing Office via email ([gchousing@gordonstate.edu](mailto:gchousing@gordonstate.edu)) or fax (678-359-5405).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

929#: \_\_\_\_\_

As of January 1, 2004, all postsecondary educational institutions in Georgia are required to provide information on meningococcal disease and vaccination to each newly admitted freshman or matriculated student residing in campus housing (Official Code of Georgia Annotated § 31-12-3.2).

**Required Information (Meningococcal Disease):**

1. Immunized with vaccine (mo/day/yr) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_
2. Reviewed and understand the information about meningococcal disease and choose NOT to be vaccinated (mo/day/yr) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE INFORMATION IS BELOW.**

As of January 1, 2004, all postsecondary educational institutions in Georgia are required to provide information on meningococcal disease and vaccination to each newly admitted freshman or matriculated student residing in campus housing (Official Code of Georgia Annotated § 31-12-3.2).

- Meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria that infect the blood or membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord. It can lead to brain damage, disability, and death.
- Overall, undergraduate students have lower risk for meningococcal disease than a non-student population. However, college freshmen, particularly those who live in residence halls, have a modestly increased risk of getting the disease. Up to 100 cases occur among the 15 million college students in the U.S. each year, with 5-15 deaths.
- Common symptoms of meningitis include stiff neck, headache, fever, sensitivity to light, sleepiness, confusion, and seizures. Meningococcal blood infection causes fever and rash.

- It can be treated with antibiotics, but treatment must be started early. Despite treatment, 10-15% of people who get the disease die from it. Another 10-20% suffer long-term consequences.
- A meningococcal vaccine is available in the United States. Check with your health care provider, student health service, or local health department for availability. The vaccine protects against four of the five most common types of this disease. Vaccine protection lasts 3-5 years and can prevent 50%-70% of cases on college campuses.
- Meningococcal vaccine may cause reactions such as pain or fever. Discuss contraindications and potential side effects with your health care provider.

#### **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. The two most common forms of meningococcal disease are meningitis, a bacterial infection of the fluid and covering of the spinal cord and brain; and septicemia, an infection of the bloodstream. Meningitis has other causes as well, the most common being viral infection.

#### **How common is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is uncommon. In the U.S., each year there are about 2,500 cases (1-2 cases for every 100,000 people).

#### **How is it diagnosed?**

A diagnosis is commonly made by growing the bacteria from the spinal fluid or blood. Identifying the bacteria is important for selecting the best antibiotics.

#### **Are college students at increased risk?**

Overall, undergraduate students have lower risk for meningococcal disease than a non-student population. Of 15 million students enrolled in college nationwide, up to 100 acquire meningococcal diseases each year. However, college freshmen living in residence halls are at a modestly increased risk. During the 1998-1999 school year, there were 30 cases among approximately 600,000 freshmen who lived in residence halls. Reasons for this increase are not fully understood, but are probably related to living in close proximity to each other.

#### **How are meningococcal bacteria spread?**

The bacteria are transmitted from person-to-person in secretions from the nose and throat. They are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air near an infected person, but require close contact. The bacteria can live outside the body for only a few minutes; so, if the germs contaminate a desk or book, they soon die and won't infect a person who touches it later.

As many as 2 in 10 people carry the bacteria in the back of the nose and throat at any given time, especially in winter. Why only a very small number of those who have the bacteria in their nose and throat develop disease, while others remain healthy, is not understood.

#### **How can I avoid getting meningococcal disease?**

You can protect yourself by maintaining good health and hygiene. Wash your hands frequently. Avoid sharing materials that make mouth contact, such as eating utensils, bottles, cigarettes, or lip balm. Don't smoke, and avoid second-hand smoke because exposure to tobacco smoke increases your risk of meningococcal disease. If you are in close contact with someone who is known or suspected to have meningococcal infection, contact a health care provider immediately. The meningococcal vaccine offers partial protection and should be considered, especially for college freshmen who live in residence halls.

#### **Is the vaccine recommended for college students?**

The decision to be vaccinated against meningococcal disease is up to the student and to his or her parents and health care provider. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics do not recommend routine meningococcal vaccination for college students (even in residence halls) for public health purposes, because the vaccine may be expensive, protection is partial and the disease is rare. Despite this, some students may wish to be vaccinated to reduce their risk of disease. Meningococcal vaccination is recommended for persons at above-average risk for meningococcal disease, including persons with certain immune system problems, those lacking a spleen, and travelers to countries where meningococcal disease is common. Some colleges may require the vaccine and it should be considered for college freshmen who will live in residence halls.

As of 2003, only one meningococcal vaccine is available in the United States. The vaccine is comprised of 4 strains of the bacteria, but does not include type B, which causes about one in four cases in Georgia. Protection lasts 3-5 years. The vaccine costs about \$75 at most health departments, but prices may vary. Discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with your health care provider. Students who choose to be vaccinated should check with their health care provider, student health service, or local health department. Health care providers can order vaccine from Aventis, the vaccine manufacturer, by calling 1-800-VACCINE.

For more information on meningococcal disease and vaccination, go to:

Georgia Division of Public Health Meningococcal Disease Information: <http://health.state.ga.us/epi/disease/menin.shtml>

CDC Meningococcal Disease Information: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/mer>

American College Health Association Recommendations on Meningococcal Vaccination:  
[http://www.acha.org/projects\\_programs/fmen.c](http://www.acha.org/projects_programs/fmen.c)

Meningococcal Disease Georgia Department of Human Resources I Division of Public Health 404-657-2588  
<http://health.state.ga.us>