

Dear Parent:

I am writing to let you know about an important opportunity your son/daughter has to protect him/herself against a serious hazard facing college students. I am referring to the growing threat of meningococcal meningitis on college campuses across the country.

As the parent of a college student, you should be aware that outbreaks of meningitis and blood infections due to the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* have risen on college campuses in recent years. The American College Health Association (ACHA) reports that between 125-150 college students nationally contract this type of meningitis each year. No cases have been reported on Wheeling Jesuit's campus, but there have been cases reported in this area. While the reasons for this rise are not yet fully understood, studies from previous college outbreaks suggest that college students are more susceptible because they live and work in close proximity to each other in dormitories and classrooms. Lifestyle appears to be a risk factor as well, with exposure to active and passive smoking, alcohol consumption, and dining in busy cafeterias and sitting in crowded lecture halls all increasing the chance that one will contract meningitis from an infected individual.

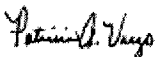
Meningitis is a serious and potentially life threatening disease that effects the brain and spinal cord and can lead to permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss and brain damage. Meningococcemia (blood infection) can lead to kidney and heart failure and also result in severe disability and death. However, there is a safe, effective vaccine that can provide protection against four strains of meningococcal disease, which together account for about 70% of meningococcal cases on campuses across the country.

The American College Health Association (ACHA) recommends that all college students consider vaccination against meningitis to protect themselves against this potentially fatal disabling disease. In addition, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) now recommends that the meningitis vaccination be provided or made easily available to college freshmen who wish to reduce their risk of the disease (based on recent findings by the CDC that freshmen who reside in dormitories are six times as likely to contract the disease as are college students overall). According to the ACIP, other undergraduate students wishing to reduce their risk of meningococcal disease can also choose to be vaccinated.

In support of these recommendations, I suggest that you discuss the risk for meningococcal disease on campus with your son or daughter, and let him/her know that the vaccine is available in the Health Center. The fee for the vaccination is currently \$65 and can be billed to a major credit card, to the student's account, or paid with a personal check or cash. Be advised that many insurance companies do not currently reimburse for the cost of this vaccine because the recommendation is fairly recent.

The meningitis vaccine has been in use for over a decade and is effective against the most common strains of the disease. Protection from the vaccine lasts for at least three to five years. Adverse reactions are mild and infrequent, consisting primarily of redness and swelling at the site of injection lasting up to two days. Meningitis immunization should be deferred during any acute illness. The vaccine should not be administered to pregnant women or individuals sensitive to thimerosal and/or other components of the vaccine. Please call the WJU Health Center at 800-624-6992 ext. 2275, if you have questions or concerns

Sincerely,



Patricia A. Vargo, MS, RN,C, CHES
Director of Health Services