

State Law on Meningitis Vaccinations

Frequently Asked Questions concerning students in Greek housing

Exactly who is required to get a meningitis vaccination?

No one. No person living in a University-owned Greek house or on-campus residence hall is required to be vaccinated against meningococcal meningitis. However, effective June 1, 2000, a new State law required each student who lives in a University-owned property in the State of Maryland to either show he/she has been vaccinated against meningitis or, if choosing not to get the vaccination, to sign a waiver stating he/she declines to receive this vaccination.

Doesn't the University already require some kind of meningitis vaccination?

No, the University doesn't require a meningitis vaccination. The University of Maryland complies with the state law for meningitis. Hepatitis B immunization and chicken pox vaccine are recommended but not required. The University Health Center's immunization form must be submitted by all students upon their entry to the University of Maryland. On this form, each student is required to provide immunization dates for the following: Measles, mumps, rubella, and tetanus/diphtheria. (Note PPD is required for International students.)

Is it a good idea to get the meningitis vaccination? How do I know what the best decision is for my health and safety?

This is a decision you might want to reach with your health care provider. The University of Maryland recommends that students become informed and make their individual decision on that basis.

Okay, so what do I have to do to comply with the law?

Every student residing in University-owned Greek housing needs to either (a) have his/her health care provider report when he/she obtained the vaccination or (b) submit the signed waiver. A Meningitis Immunization form, which serves both purposes, was distributed to students when they arrived on campus to move in. For students who previously obtained the vaccination and need to have this fact certified by their health care provider, the form (if lost or misplaced) also can be downloaded from the Health Center website, www.health.umd.edu.

Where can I go to get a vaccination?

Most physicians' offices, clinics, hospitals, county or city health departments, etc. will administer the vaccination. You should begin by checking with your health care provider. When you go to one of these sources for your vaccination, be sure to carry with you the Meningitis Immunization form, since your health care provider must fill it out on your behalf.

The University Health Center (301-314-8182) offers the vaccination on a walk-in basis. Hours for this service are weekdays 9:00-11:00 a.m. and 2:00-4:00 p.m. Your cost is \$72.00, which can be charged to your University financial account and paid along with your other Fall charges. Student health insurance obtained through the University Health Center covers the cost of this vaccine.

I'd like to get the vaccination at the Health Center on campus, but it would be more convenient to do that after I've moved into my fraternity/sorority. Will that be okay?

Yes. Students can obtain their vaccinations up to 10 days after they arrive on campus.

Will my insurance cover the cost of the vaccination?

We can't be sure. It depends on the insurer and the coverages selected. You should check with your health care provider and/or insurance company.

What if I already have had the vaccination? Do I just forget about this whole matter?

No, you can't just ignore this matter. You must provide proof of recent vaccination (within the past five years) by submitting a copy of past immunization records or by having the Meningitis Immunization form completed by the health care provider who administered the vaccination. The vaccine is effective for approximately three to five years, so individuals whose vaccinations were obtained before 2000 may wish to consider getting another vaccine.

I've already had my vaccination at the University Health Center. What do I do?

To ensure that we have your valid information on file, you need to submit the Meningitis Immunization form or otherwise report this information to the University Health Center staff. If you have questions about whether or not you have a valid form on file, contact the Health Center directly.

What is meningitis? I've heard people can die from it.

Meningococcal bacteria as well as other viruses and microscopic organisms in the body can cause meningitis (sometimes called spinal meningitis), which is an inflammation of the material covering the brain and spinal cord. Meningococcal bacteria also can cause a second very serious form of infection (meningococcal septicemia, a bacterial infection in the blood stream). This form of the disease sometimes occurs suddenly and can be rapidly fatal. The risk of meningococcal disease is 4.6 per 100,000 in college students, according to a recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study. Students in residence halls or Greek houses may have a modestly increased risk. CDC says meningitis strikes about 100 college students every year, killing an average of six to eight students. The University Health Center bulletin on Meningococcal Disease should be reviewed in its entirety. This document was also distributed to students at an earlier date and can be accessed at www.health.umd.edu.

How does someone contract the disease?

Through close contact with an infected person. Meningococcal bacteria usually cannot live for more than a few minutes outside the body of an infected person. The bacteria that causes the illness is not transmitted by routine contact with an infected person in campus locations such as classrooms, dining rooms, restrooms, etc. Friends, classmates, etc. are not at risk so long as they are not directly exposed to someone infected with meningitis through close contact, such as kissing, sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses or bottles, cigarettes, etc. or coughing and sneezing.

What are the symptoms of the disease that I should watch out for?

Symptoms in a healthy person will usually occur two to ten days after that person's exposure through close contact to an infected person, who may or may not be exhibiting any symptoms. Meningitis usually begins with flu-like symptoms, which can begin suddenly and progress to high fever, nausea, vomiting, severe headache, and stiffness and pains in the neck, shoulders and back. Often a skin rash of tiny bright red spots appears. Students who experience the earliest of these symptoms should seek medical attention right away. Prompt treatment of the symptoms is very important, because there is medicine for meningococcal meningitis.

Is meningitis a big problem at the University of Maryland?

No. University Health Center officials know of about 10 cases of meningitis at the University over the past 20 years or so. It's no more of a problem here than at other colleges and universities. Students in a group-living environment such as a residence hall or fraternity or sorority may be exposed to bacteria they have not previously encountered. Accordingly, special care should be taken to avoid sneezes and coughs, kisses, and sharing of food and utensils with individuals who feel sick. Individuals who choose to drink should take special care to be responsible in their behavior and to avoid sharing bottles, glasses, cigarettes, kisses, sneezes, coughs, etc. with any individual who feels sick or exhibits cold or flu-like symptoms.

Why is this being done? How did this Law come about?

The law was passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland during its Spring 2000 legislative session. The originating Senate bill says the legislation is intended to prevent the introduction or spread of an infectious or contagious disease in the state.

How are students being notified of this requirement?

Announcements were made beginning in May 2000. Details about how students are expected to report their meningococcal vaccine records, or submit their signed waivers, are distributed yearly. A response from every student has been requested by the first day of classes, and will be expected no later than September 13th.

What will happen if a student doesn't comply with the law by the time he or she shows up to move in?

Each Greek resident student's records will be checked for evidence that the student has complied with the law. A student who has not submitted proof of vaccination or a waiver to their house director or directly to the Health Center will be instructed to complete and submit the Meningitis Immunization to the Health Center within 10 days.

What's involved in getting the vaccination?

The vaccine for meningococcal meningitis is administered by an injection, usually into the arm muscle. There should be no unusual side effects from the injection. At most, you might feel soreness at the injection site for a day or so. The vaccine protects against four types of the disease (types A, C, Y and W-135), and is about 85%-90% effective against these types. The vaccine does not protect against type B disease, for which there is no vaccine at this time. Most meningococcal disease in the U.S. and other industrialized nations is caused by type B or type C.

What about students in the residence halls? Do they have to comply with the new law in the same way?

Yes, students living in all University-owned residences, including the residence halls, must comply with the law in the same way as Greek students. Students living in the following private properties are exempt under the law and do not have to comply in the same way as other residence hall and Greek students: Terrapin Tower, University Courtyard Apartments, privately owned Greek chapter houses, the Graduate Hills and Graduate Gardens apartments, and all other off-campus facilities where University students may be living. We strongly encourage these students to also receive the vaccine.

What about House Directors? Do they have to either get vaccinations or sign waivers?

House Directors are neither required to obtain vaccinations nor sign waivers. In other words, these persons are exempt from the new law by design – because they are not resident students. Staff members are encouraged to read the University Health Center bulletin and consult with their health care provider as part of making any decision about whether to obtain a vaccination. Vaccinations, if obtained, are at the expense of the individual unless other arrangements are made through the house corporation board. One's health insurance coverage should be checked to determine whether this expense may be covered.

How can I get more information about meningitis?

A University Health Center health bulletin about meningococcal meningitis was distributed with the Meningitis Immunization form and can be accessed at www.health.umd.edu. Questions can be directed to Health Center staff at 301-314-8182 or to your local physician or county health department.