



BLEDSOE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION



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Health Information: Meningitis

Dear Parents,

Meningitis is a disease caused by the inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord known as the meninges. The inflammation is usually caused by an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. There are 5 types of meningitis: bacterial, viral, fungal, parasitic, and non-infectious meningitis.

Bacterial meningitis is contagious and *potentially fatal*. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., kissing, sharing eating utensils or cups).

Viral meningitis is most often spread from person to person through *fecal contamination* (which can occur when changing a diaper or using the toilet and not properly washing hands afterwards).

Fungal meningitis is *not contagious*, which means it is not transmitted from person to person. Fungal meningitis can develop after a fungus spreads through the bloodstream from somewhere else in the body, as a result of the fungus being introduced directly into the central nervous system, or from an infected body site infection next to the central nervous system.

Parasitic meningitis *cannot be spread from one person to another*. It is usually caused by an organism in water that affects people by entering the body through the nose and traveling to the brain. This typically occurs when people go swimming or diving in warm freshwater places, like lakes and rivers. In very rare instances, the causative parasite has been identified in water from other sources (such as inadequately chlorinated swimming pool water or heated tap water <47°C). **These infections are very rare; from 2001 to 2010, only 32 infections were reported in the U.S.**

Non-infectious meningitis is *not spread from person to person*. It can be caused by cancers, lupus, certain drugs, head injury, and brain surgery.

Symptoms: Any type of meningitis infection is characterized by fever, headache, and stiff neck and is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, extreme sensitivity to light, and altered mental status. These symptoms can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within 3-7 days after exposure. The severity of illness and the treatment for meningitis differ depending on the cause, so it is important to know the specific cause of meningitis.

If you have any questions about meningitis or are concerned about yourself or a family member, please contact your health care provider.

What You Need To Know About MENINGOCOCCAL VACCINES

The Meningococcal vaccine is available to you through your Health Care Provider. This vaccine is NOT required to attend Bledsoe County Schools.

1. What is meningococcal disease? Meningitis is an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and the spinal cord. It can also cause blood infections. Meningitis can be either bacterial or viral. It is the bacterial meningococcal disease that is a serious illness for all ages.

2. Meningococcal Vaccine Two vaccines are available in the US. Meningococcal polysaccharide (MPSV4) has been available since the 1970's. Meningococcal conjugates vaccine (MCV4) was licensed in 2005. Each vaccine can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the US. It cannot prevent all types of the disease. Both vaccines work well in about 90% of the people who get it.

3. Who should get meningococcal vaccine and when? MCV4 is often recommended for all children at their routine preadolescent visit (11-12 years of age). A dose may be recommended at high school or college entry if the child has never received the vaccine before. It may also be recommended for microbiologists, US military, travel to Africa, or for individuals with a damaged spleen.

4. Who could get meningococcal disease? Anyone can get meningococcal disease. It is most common in infants less than one year of age and people with certain medical conditions, such as lack of a spleen. College freshmen who live in dormitories have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease. In order to get the disease the bacteria must enter the body and settle in the area around the brain and spinal cord.

5. Symptoms of meningococcal disease. Symptoms may include high fever, severe headache, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, pain with moving neck, alertness changes such as sleepiness or confusion and sensitivity to light.

6. Who should you contact for more information or concerns? Contact your Health Care Provider or your local Health Department (423-447-2149) or you can go to the CDC website at: www.cdc.gov/vaccines.

Information from:

Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Immunization Program Meningococcal

4/4/05 Vaccine Information Statement (Interim)

www.mayoclinic.com/health/meningitis