

## **Meningococcal Meningitis**

### **Information Line recording 11.26.03**

Recently an off campus Binghamton University Student was hospitalized with Meningococcal Meningitis. He is recovering in the hospital.

An investigation by the Broome County Health Department, United Health Services and the University Health Service has been undertaken to contact those people considered to be at risk of exposure to this illness. Those individuals have been asked to contact their medical provider concerning possible preventive medication.

Meningococcal organisms are transmitted by DIRECT Contact only. "Intimate contacts" may be at increased risk for exposure. "Intimate Contacts" are defined as household contacts, those that share the same sleeping space, and people socially close enough to share eating utensils.

Sharing classroom space does not increase the risk of infection. Likewise, those who have been in contact with "intimate contacts" are not at increased risk of infection.

Additional information concerning Meningococcal meningitis follows:

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord). It is a relatively rare disease and usually occurs as a single isolated event. Clusters of cases or outbreaks are rare in the United States.

Meningococcal disease is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in young adults, 18 – 24 years of age. Research has indicated that freshman college students living in dorms are at a moderately increased risk for contracting this disease.

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. The germs that cause bacterial meningitis are very common and live naturally in the back of the nose and throat. People of any age can carry these germs without becoming ill. Rarely, the germs can overcome the body's defenses and cause meningitis. College freshman living in dormitories may have reduced defenses due to lack of sleep, unhealthy eating habits and high levels of stress, thereby moderately increasing the risk for contracting Meningococcal disease.

Although most people exposed to the meningococcus germ do not become seriously ill, some may develop fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash. If you are experiencing these symptoms and are concerned, please contact a medical provider. Up to 25 percent of patients who recover may have chronic damage to the nervous system. The disease is occasionally fatal.

The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

From the time a person is first infected until the germ is no longer present in discharges from the nose and throat, he or she may transmit the disease. The duration varies according to treatment used.

Special Antibiotics can be used to treat people with Meningococcal disease.

Only people who have been in close contact (household members, intimate contacts, health care personnel performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, etc.) need to be considered for preventive treatment. Such people are usually advised to obtain a prescription for a special antibiotic from their physician. Casual contact as might occur in a regular classroom or office setting is not usually significant enough to cause concern.

Presently, there is a vaccine that will protect against some of the strains of meningococcus. For some college students, such as freshman living in dormitories, there is a modestly increased risk of Meningococcal disease; it is important for students and parents to consider the risks and benefits of getting the Meningococcal Meningitis vaccine.

Again if you experience rapid onset of severe symptoms, call your medical provider immediately.

Links to more information about Meningococcal Meningitis can be found at the Broome County website at [www.gobroomecounty.com/safety](http://www.gobroomecounty.com/safety), go to community Health links and then click on either the NYS DOH or The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Links.