

**Meningococcal disease** is a rare but potentially fatal bacterial disease that occurs either as meningococcal meningitis, inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, or meningococemia, presence of bacteria in the blood. Meningococcal disease occurs in about 1-3 out of 100,000 people each year but is more common among freshman students living in on-campus housing. About 10-15% of those affected die in spite of antibiotic treatment, and of those who survive, another 10%- 20% lose limbs, become deaf, have neurological problems, become mentally disabled or suffer seizures or strokes.

Meningococcal bacteria are transmitted through the air via droplets of respiratory secretions and through direct contact with persons infected with the disease. Oral contact with shared items such as cigarettes or drinking glasses, or through intimate contact such as kissing could put a person at risk for acquiring the infection. People identified as close contacts of a patient with meningococcal disease should receive antibiotics to prevent the disease.

Symptoms include high fever, severe headaches, neck stiffness, rash, nausea, vomiting and lethargy (confusion, sleepiness, being hard to wake up). Because the disease progresses rapidly, often in as little as 12 hours, those who experience two or more of the above symptoms are urged to seek immediate medical care.

The vaccine is considered to be safe, but should not be given to those who have had a serious allergic reaction to any of the vaccine components. Anyone with a history of Guillain-Barre syndrome should speak to their health care provider before getting the conjugate (Menactra) vaccine. Some people have mild side effects including redness or pain at the injection site or fever. The vaccine does not completely eliminate the possibility of infection, but is effective against the strains responsible for two-thirds of the cases on college campuses.

**Hepatitis B** is a serious infectious disease that attacks the liver and can lead to lifelong infection or even death. The virus is spread when an individual comes in contact with blood or other body fluids of an infected person through broken skin or mucous membranes. Each year approximately 3,000 - 5,000 people die from Hepatitis B. Although there is no cure, the infection can be prevented by vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination of everyone 18 years of age and under, as well as for others at high risk for Hepatitis B, including anyone with more than one lifetime sexual partner.

Unprotected sex, non-sterile body piercing and tattoos, sharing needles, toothbrushes, razors, and pierced earrings, and travel abroad to countries where Hepatitis B is common can increase the risk for college students. In addition, health sciences students (e.g., nursing and medical students) are at particular risk of exposure through patient care.

The Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective but should not be given to anyone who has had a life threatening reaction to baker's yeast or to a previous dose of the vaccine. The most common side effect of the vaccine is soreness at the site of the injection. Vaccination requires a series of three shots over a six-month period, and provides long term immunity. In addition to vaccination, people can attempt to reduce their risk by using condoms during sex and avoiding tattooing and body piercing with non-sterile instruments or techniques. They also can avoid sharing needles, pierced earrings, razors, or toothbrushes.

**Meningococcal Meningitis and Hepatitis B immunizations** are available at the University of Miami Student Health Service, although periodic vaccine shortages may occur. More information is available at [www.miami.edu/student-health](http://www.miami.edu/student-health).