

MENINGITIS ON CAMPUS – KNOW YOUR RISK

If you are planning to request a waiver from the meningitis vaccine, you are required to read this information first: Certain college students are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis. In fact, young adults living in campus housing are found to have up to six-fold increased risk for the disease, given the communal living environment. Pennsylvania law requires that all college students planning to live in campus-owned housing receive a vaccination against meningococcal disease unless the student reviews information about the risks of the disease and the availability of the vaccine, and chooses not to receive the vaccine for religious or other reasons. Please read the following, before signing the waiver on the opposite side of this page.

WHAT IS MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is rare. But when it strikes, this potentially fatal bacterial disease can lead to swelling of fluid surrounding the brain and spinal column, as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even death.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Meningococcal meningitis is spread through the air via respiratory secretions or close contact with an infected person. This can include coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing items like utensils, cigarettes and drinking glasses.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis often are similar to those of the flu and can include high fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, lethargy and confusion.

WHO IS AT RISK?

College students, particularly those residing in residence halls or similar large group settings, have been found to have an increased risk for meningococcal meningitis. Other undergraduates can also consider vaccination to reduce their risk for the disease.

CAN MENINGITIS BE PREVENTED?

Yes. A safe and effective vaccine is available to protect against four of the five most common strains of the disease. The vaccine provides protection for approximately three to five years. As with any vaccine, vaccination against meningitis may not protect 100 percent of all susceptible individuals. At least 70% of all cases of meningococcal disease in college students are vaccine preventable (types A, C, Y, and W135), and the recent approval of an additional meningitis vaccine for type B further increases the efficacy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, call the Mercyhurst University Cohen Student Health Center at 814-824-2431, or email the center at health@mercyhurst.edu. You may also visit the websites of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo, and the American College Health Association, www.acha.org.

*****COMPLETE ONLY IF REQUESTING EXEMPTION FROM MENINGITIS VACCINE*****

I understand that under Pennsylvania law students enrolled in a Pennsylvania institution of higher education and who reside in on-campus student housing are required to be vaccinated against meningococcal disease, or may seek exemption from this law. I have read the meningitis information available on the previous page where the risks of not obtaining the vaccine are detailed. In addition, I acknowledge the detrimental health effects of the disease. I have also read about and understand the availability and effectiveness of the vaccine.

I do not wish the vaccine, and I voluntarily agree to release, discharge, indemnify and hold harmless Mercyhurst University, its officers, employees and agents from any and all costs, liabilities, expenses, claims, demands, or causes of action on account of any loss or personal injury that might result from my non-compliance with the law. I am also aware that in the event of an outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases, the university will consider and may require temporary exclusion of non-immunized students from school in order to reduce the spread of the disease. Financial refunds or additional time to make up any missed coursework are not guaranteed in the event of mandatory absence under this policy. My grounds for requesting this waiver from Pennsylvania law are:

_____ Medical (in addition to submitting this signed waiver, please include a signed statement from your physician verifying the medical reason the vaccine should not be provided).

_____ Religious (I, _____, adhere to a religious belief whose teachings are opposed to such immunizations.)

_____ Other (please be aware that students requesting a vaccine waiver in this category will be expected to complete a health education session in the upcoming semester designed by the Health Center)

To be filled out by student. If the student is under age 18, a parent/guardian must sign this waiver.

I have read and signed this document with full knowledge of its significance. I further state that I am at least 18 years of age and competent to sign this waiver.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Student _____ Date of Birth _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian (for student under 18) _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS TO THE COHEN STUDENT HEALTH CENTER. You may fax it (814-347-8275); scan and email it to health@mercyhurst.edu; or mail it to: Cohen Student Health Center, Mercyhurst University • 501 East 38th Street • Erie, PA 16546. If you have any questions, contact the Health Center at 814-824-2431.