

To : Students, Faculty, and Staff
Fr: Kristine C. Goodwin, Vice President for Student Affairs
Date: February 5, 2015

IMPORTANT HEALTH ADVISORY

On February 2nd, the College sent a Health Advisory about a confirmed case of meningococcal meningitis at the College. I am writing today to inform you of a possible second case and to tell you what we are doing to protect the campus community.

Our latest information is that both students remain hospitalized. I ask that you keep them in your thoughts and prayers. We are in close contact with the students and their families and offering all the support we can.

This is a serious health matter, and we are working closely and collaboratively with the Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address this issue. As noted in last week's email, meningococcal meningitis is an infection of the lining that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Health officials notified us today that the meningitis vaccination, which many students received prior to coming to campus in September, is not effective in protecting against the Group B strain which was identified in one of our students. There is now a vaccine available for Group B meningitis. This vaccine is approved for persons between the ages of 10 and 25, and those persons above the age of 25 who are immunocompromised.

HEALTH has informed us that only intimate saliva-sharing contacts are at risk, and neither faculty nor staff would fall into this category. So no prophylaxis or vaccination is indicated for them. If a member of the faculty or staff has a medical condition in which his or her immune system may be compromised or, if the faculty or staff member does not have a spleen, please contact Elisabeth Walsh, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources/Director of Benefits, for further information. Elisabeth may be reached at 401-865-2746.

We are working with HEALTH to make this vaccine available and we will be in touch as soon as we have details.

In the interim, we have expanded the hours of our Student Health Center to be open 24/7 for the immediate future to better respond to any student who presents with symptoms, to continue interviews with those students who have been in close contact with students who are ill, and to provide prophylactic treatment as necessary. EMTs will continue to be available to go to students' rooms if needed.

We are working on publishing additional educational material on our web site, and I expect we will have that available within the next 24 hours.

The bacterial infection is spread through direct secretions from the nose or mouth through activities such as kissing; or sharing food, drinks, water bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils, or cigarettes. Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics, but quick medical attention is extremely important.

Meningitis may present as sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. It will often have other symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light and altered mental status and/or a skin rash. The symptoms of bacterial meningitis can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within 3-7 days of exposure.

A person can be a carrier of meningitis without any symptoms. While this is not an exhaustive list, the following precautions are recommended by HEALTH:

- Don't share food, drinks, smoking materials, eating utensils, cosmetics or lip balm
- Always cough into a sleeve or tissue
- Wash your hands frequently
- Use hand sanitizer often
- Don't drink from a common source such as a punch bowl

If you or a close contact become sick:

- Anyone with a high fever should seek medical attention immediately
- Students should immediately report to or call the Student Health Center (x2422)
- If you see vomit anywhere, do not attempt to clean it up yourself. Please report it to the office of Safety & Security (x2391). They will arrange to have it cleaned.
- You may become ill with meningitis even if you have not been in contact with someone who is sick

For the time being, the distribution of Holy Communion at all masses will only happen in one species, the Body of Christ.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Student Health Services at 401-865-2422.

Additional information on bacterial meningitis can be found at the Rhode Island Department of Health website (www.health.state.ri.us) as well as the website for the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov).

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