



Frequently Asked Questions About Meningitis and the Cases at Providence College February 5, 2015

How many cases of meningitis have there been at Providence College?

Since January 31, 2014 one student has been diagnosed with meningococcal disease and a second student has been identified as a probable case. Close contacts of these students have been identified and are receiving preventive antibiotics.

Is there a vaccine against this infection?

Yes. The type of meningitis that has been detected in one of the students at Providence College (PC) is the serogroup (or type) B meningitis. People are vaccinated against other strains of meningitis when they are adolescents, but serogroup B (also called meningitis B) is not included in the routine vaccine given. However, there is a new meningitis vaccine that protects against meningitis B. It is approved for people from 10 to 25 years old.

Will PC students be vaccinated?

The Rhode Island Department of Health is working with PC and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to organize an on-site college vaccination clinic, to prevent the spread of meningitis B, for Providence College's roughly 3800 undergraduate students, graduate students living on campus, and staff who are under 25 years old and/or have a suppressed immune system.

What is meningococcal disease (or meningococcal meningitis)?

Meningococcal meningitis is a severe bacterial infection of the bloodstream and/or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord) caused by meningococcus bacteria.

Who gets meningitis?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children. For some young people, such as college students living in dormitories, there is an increased risk of meningococcal disease. Every year in the United States approximately 2,500 people are infected and 300 die from the disease.

How does meningitis spread?

Meningitis spreads from person to person through direct close contact with the respiratory and throat secretions of someone with the bacteria. This includes coughing, sneezing, sharing drinks, kissing, and being in close proximity for an extended period of time. To limit the spread of illness, you should avoid sharing cups, cosmetics, toothbrushes, smoking materials or anything that comes in contact with your mouth.

How to prevent the spread of meningitis

Do NOT share anything that comes in contact with the mouth including:

- Water bottles
- Mouth guards
- Face masks
- Towels
- Drinking glasses
- Eating utensils
- Cosmetics
- Toothbrushes
- Smoking materials
- Kisses
- Food or drink from a common source such as a punch bowl

Do NOT cough or sneeze into another person's face. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue.

What are the symptoms of meningitis?

- High fever
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Stiff neck
- Rash
- Body aches/joint pain
- Nausea/vomiting
- Increased sensitivity to light
- Confusion

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

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

Anyone experiencing high fever with a new skin rash or other symptoms of meningitis, such as headache or stiff neck, should be examined by a healthcare provider immediately. Early treatment of meningitis is critical, as the infection can quickly become life-threatening.

If someone has meningitis, how is it treated?

Most people with meningococcal disease are hospitalized and treated with antibiotics. Depending on the severity of the infection, other treatments may also be necessary.

How are close contacts to the ill students at PC being treated?

People who have had close contact (e.g. living in the same dorm, kissing, sharing eating utensils or food, sharing drinks, sharing cigarettes) are being given antibiotics.

If alcohol sanitizes, is it safe to share an alcoholic beverage with my friend?

Sharing anything that comes in contact with the mouth (e.g., drinking cups, cans, or bottles) can lead to the spread of meningitis. Alcoholic beverages do not prevent the spread of illness.

Should people avoid visiting Providence College during this time?

No. There is no recommendation to cancel any activities or scheduled events on campus.

Why isn't the Rhode Island Department of Health recommending cancelling activities or events at Providence College?

Restricting visits to areas with meningitis cases, closing schools or universities, or cancelling sporting or social events are not recommended measures for outbreak control because the bacteria do not spread easily from casual contact. Things like the flu and the common cold spread more easily than meningitis.

Should residents from the surrounding community avoid contact with Providence College students?

No. There is no recommendation for the surrounding community to avoid contact with Providence College or Providence College students. Meningitis does not spread easily from casual contact.

Where can I get more information?

More information is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html>. People from the Providence College community can call Student Health Services at 401-865-2422.