



For Immediate Release:

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‘Tis The Season to Get Vaccinated

Meningococcal vaccine is recommended for college students

LOS ANGELES – With college students coming home for the holidays and the recent news of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) among college students and staff at Princeton University in New Jersey and at the University of California campuses of Santa Barbara and Riverside; the Los Angeles County Health Officer would like to remind college students and residents (especially those residing in dormitories) about the importance of being up-to-date on meningococcal vaccinations.

“Young adults should get vaccinated if they are living in college dorms or close quarters because the meningococcal disease is spread through prolonged close exposure and direct contact,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “It is important to know that the current meningococcal vaccine can prevent two of the three most common types of meningococcal disease in the United States. Also, meningococcal disease can be treated with appropriate antibiotics if caught early.”

Meningococcal meningitis disease is a sporadic and uncommon infection of the lining of the brain and the spinal cord. The disease can cause brain damage, hearing loss, and even death. Many people can carry meningococcal bacteria in their nose and throat and not be sick. The bacteria can be spread by very close exposure to sneezing and coughing or direct contact with saliva (spit) or nose mucus (snot). Disease symptoms may include: high fever, stiff neck, altered mental status, skin rash, severe headache, low blood pressure, aversion to bright lights, and generalized muscle pains. Persons who have direct contact with the saliva or nose mucus of a person known to be infected with meningococcal meningitis should immediately contact their healthcare provider to receive appropriate antibiotic treatment.

The bacteria are not spread by casual contact like being in the same room that a sick person has been in or handling items that a sick person has touched. Although anyone can get meningococcal disease, adolescents and college students who live in dormitories are at an increased risk. The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are less infectious than the viruses that cause the flu, however both are highly communicable.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends two doses of meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra® or Menveo®) for all adolescents at ages 11-12 and 16 years. First-year students living in residence halls are recommended to receive at least one dose of vaccine prior to college entry. If only one dose of vaccine was given before age 16 years, an additional dose should be given before college enrollment.

The meningococcal vaccines licensed in the United States offer protection against meningococcal disease due to serogroups A, C, Y, and W135, which cause about 73% of IMD in the United States. These vaccines do not offer protection against serogroup B disease, the strain



identified in the current outbreaks at Princeton University and UC San Barbara. Currently, there is no licensed vaccine for serogroup B in the United States. However, a serogroup B vaccine was licensed in Europe and Australia in 2013 and is currently under review for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Additional healthy habits to prevent the spread of diseases include:

- Washing your hands frequently, especially after using the restroom and before and after eating
- Covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- Not touching your nose, mouth or eyes to prevent the spread of germs
- Staying home from work or school when sick
- Practice healthy habits such as avoiding smoking, and sharing items with saliva (utensils, water bottles)
- Keep up to date with recommended vaccines.

For more information regarding invasive meningococcal disease and vaccination, please visit www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/ and <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/Mening.htm>. To find additional information about other immunizations, go to <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/parents.htm>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises nearly 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: @LAPublicHealth.

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