



Meningococcal vaccination could save your child's life

By Merilla Hopkins, Lincoln Hospital Pharmacist



We parents spend a lot of time and money making sure our kids are ready to leave home. Whether they're off to college, a career or the military, we make sure they have the necessities to take with them – clothes, money, calling cards, dishes, furniture, more money. We provide them with everything they need – almost.

Many parents forget to give their kids the gift of good health before they leave the nest – that gift is a simple immunization against Meningococcal Disease.

Meningococcal (aka meningitis) is now the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in children and young adults in the U.S. Ten percent of meningitis cases end in death. It is so aggressive that it can kill an otherwise healthy young person in 48 hours. Forty percent of those who survive, experience limb amputation, scarring, neurological damage or hearing loss.

What is Meningococcal?

It's a bacterial infection of the fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord. The most common symptoms often mimic the flu and include high fever, headache and body aches. Often there is nausea, vomiting confusion, sleepiness or sensitivity to bright lights. However, the tell-tale symptom is a stiff neck.

Because symptoms are so close to the flu, many teens and young adults confuse their sore neck with general body aches and ignore the severity of their condition, often to disastrous results. Death rates from Meningococcal Disease are five times higher in 15 to 24-year-olds than any other age group.

Is Meningococcal contagious?

Yes. It is spread orally – through coughing, kissing, sharing cups or utensils. College campuses have been known to have outbreaks of Meningococcal, especially in dormitories, sororities, fraternities or other living situations with lots of people sharing a small space.

Those going into the military should take special caution, not only because of barrack living. Although large outbreaks of the disease don't happen in the U.S., some countries experience large, periodic epidemics and those going into the armed services need to be aware of their increased risk.

Fortunately, there is a Meningococcal vaccine. The vaccine we give our infants and toddlers is called the HIB shot and it generally lasts through adolescence. During the teen years, another dose is needed.

Lincoln Hospital, North Basin Medical Clinics and the Lincoln County Health Department are teaming up to make sure high school seniors especially receive their Meningococcal vaccine.

For more information on Meningococcal or the vaccine, call Lincoln Hospital Pharmacist Merilla Hopkins at (509) 725-7101 ext. 152.