

To: Upstate Students and Parents

From: Student Health

Re: **Meningococcal Disease and Vaccine**

Date: March 2022

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Meningococcal disease is a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis. New York State Public Health Law (NYS PHL) §2167 requires institutions, including colleges and universities, to distribute information about meningococcal disease and vaccine to all students meeting the enrollment criteria, whether they live on or off campus.

Upstate Medical University is required to maintain a record of the following for each student:

- A response to receipt of meningococcal disease and vaccine information signed by the student or student's parent or guardian  
**AND EITHER**
- A record of meningococcal immunization within the past 5 years; **OR**
- An acknowledgement of meningococcal disease risks and declination of meningococcal immunization signed by the student or student's parent or guardian.

Meningococcal disease is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. Meningococcal disease can cause serious illnesses such as infection of the lining of the brain and spinal column (meningitis) or blood infections (sepsis). The disease strikes quickly and can lead to severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even lead to death.

Meningococcal disease can be easily spread from person-to-person by coughing, sharing beverages or eating utensils, kissing, or spending time in close contact with someone who is sick or who carries the bacteria. People can spread the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease even before they know they are sick. There have been several outbreaks of meningococcal disease at college campuses across the United States.

**The single best way to prevent meningococcal disease is to be vaccinated.** The meningococcal ACWY (MenACWY) vaccine protects against four major strains of bacteria which cause about two-thirds of meningococcal disease in the United States (U.S.). The MenACWY vaccine is recommended for all U.S. teenagers and young adults up to age 21 years. Protection from the MenACWY vaccine is estimated to last about 3 to 5 years, so young adults who received the MenACWY vaccine before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday should get a booster dose before entering college. The meningococcal B (MenB) vaccine protects against a fifth type of meningococcal disease, which accounts for about one-third of cases in the U.S. Young adults

aged 16 through 23 years may choose to receive the MenB vaccine series. They should discuss the MenB vaccine with a healthcare provider.

All private insurance plans not grandfathered under the Affordable Care Act are required to cover the cost of MenACWY and MenB vaccines. Contact your health insurance plan to determine whether it covers MenACWY and MenB vaccines. The federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) and NYS Vaccines for Adults (VFA) programs will cover both MenACWY and MenB vaccines for children and adults who have no health insurance or whose health insurance does not cover these vaccines, as well as for children less than 19 years of age who are American Indian or Alaska Native or eligible for Medicaid or Child Health Plus.

***The Upstate Employee/Student Health Office does not maintain a stock supply of meningococcal vaccine.*** Therefore, it is best that vaccination be administered by your personal physician prior to arrival on campus. If, instead, you decide to be vaccinated after arrival, this can be arranged by the Health Office, but may result in greater out-of-pocket expense.

Please carefully review the Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet from the New York State Department of Health website at [www.health.ny.gov/publications/2168.pdf](http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2168.pdf). **Please complete the Meningococcal Vaccination Response Form and return it to Upstate Student Health with your completed admission health information packet.**

You can also find additional information about the meningococcal disease on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/](http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/).