

Your Health Matters

MENINGITIS: IS YOUR TEEN AT RISK?

They'll always be your babies. So, parents need to make sure teens get a second shot to help prevent meningitis. Teens entering 8th grade in fall 2016 and high school seniors will need one more immunization than in past years. Missouri has updated its vaccination requirements for school children to include vaccination against meningococcal disease.

Teenagers and young adults are at great risk of getting meningitis as their immunity from the initial vaccination wanes. Even if your teen already received a meningitis shot at age 11 and 12 year, he or she still needs a second vaccination as early as 16 years of age.

Though rare, meningitis can destroy lives. In less than 24 hours, it can cause brain damage, lost limbs, even death. "I lost both of my legs, my kidneys, my spleen, part of my hearing, and almost my life to meningitis. And I'm one of the lucky ones." says Amy Purdy, Olympic snowboarder and meningitis survivor.

It often unexpectedly impacts teens and young adults who appear otherwise to be healthy. It is caused by bacteria that cause infections to the lining of the brain or spinal cord, or cause bloodstream infections.

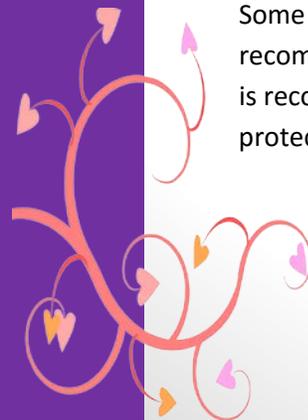
About 1,000 people get meningitis each year in the United States. It is spread from person-to-person through activities like kissing, sharing drinks, food or eating utensils, sharing a cigarette or lipstick, coughing, and having close social contact, including living together.

Symptoms can include a high fever, chills, nausea, exhaustion and a rash. The symptoms are sometimes confused with flu symptoms, but an infected person can become seriously ill very quickly. A person who has a sudden onset of these symptoms, or has severe symptoms should seek medical care immediately.

The best way to prevent meningitis is to be vaccinated against it. The new Missouri school immunization requirements add one dose of meningococcal vaccine for students entering 8th grade and a booster dose for students entering 12th grade.

Some meningococcal vaccines are designed to protect against four strains of meningitis. The CDC recommends a second vaccine to protect against one other strain. The second meningococcal vaccine is recommended for 16 year olds. There is not one meningococcal vaccine right now that offers protection against all the common strains of meningitis.

Students can visit their health care provider or the Health Department to get all recommended doses of meningococcal vaccine. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■



Linda Harman