Dear Student and Parent:

As the Director of the Student Health Center at Clarkson University, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis, and a new law in New York State. On July 22, 2003, Governor Pataki signed New York State Public Health Law (NYS PHL) 2167 requiring institutions, including colleges and universities, to distribute information about meningococcal disease and vaccination to all students meeting the enrollment criteria, whether they live on or off campus. This law became effective on August 15, 2003.

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

- A record of meningococcal meningitis immunization within the past 10 years: (Immunization Report Part II)

or

- An acknowledgement of meningococcal disease risks and refusal of meningococcal meningitis immunization signed by the student or student's parent or guardian. (Part II of the immunization report)

Meningitis is rare. However, when it strikes, its flu-like symptoms make diagnosis difficult. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to swelling of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal column as well as severe and permanent disabilities, such as hearing loss, brain damage, seizures, limb amputation and even death. Causes of meningitis among teens and young adults 15-24 years of age (the age of most college students) have more than doubled since 1991. The disease strikes about 3,000 Americans each year and claims about 300 lives. Between 100 and 125 meningitis cases occur on college campuses and as many as 15 students will die from the disease.

A vaccine is available that protects against four types of the bacteria that cause meningitis in the United States – types A, C, Y, and W-135. These types account for nearly two thirds of meningitis cases among college students.

The vaccine is normally available at the Student Health Center. Please call for the current cost. The vaccine is also available at our St. Lawrence County Public Health Department. You may call them at 315-386-2325 for their current cost. I encourage you and your child to carefully review the enclosed materials. Please complete the Meningococcal Meningitis Response Form only if you do not have valid documentation for vaccination of meningoccal disease and return it to: Student Health Center, Clarkson University, Box 5643, Potsdam, NY 13699-5643.

NOTE: PER PUBLIC HEALTH LAW, NO INSTITUTION SHOULD PERMIT ANY STUDENT TO ATTEND THE INSTITUTION IN EXCESS OF 30 DAYS WITHOUT COMPLYING WITH THIS LAW. THE 30-DAY PERIOD MAY BE EXTENDED TO 60 DAYS IF A STUDENT CAN SHOW A GOOD FAITH EFFORT TO COMPLY.

To learn more about meningitis and the vaccine, please feel free to contact our Student Health Center and/or consult your child's physician.

Sincerely,

Susan Knowles MSN FNP-BS
Director of Student Health Center
Clarkson University

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control

Meningococcal Disease

What is meningococcal disease?

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

Who gets meningococcal disease?

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children. For some adolescents, such as first year 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 is the germ meningococcus spread?

The meningococcus germ is spread by direct close contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

High fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. The symptoms may appear 2-10 days after exposure, but usually within 5 days. Among people who develop meningococcal disease, 10-15% die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, kidney failure, loss of arms or legs, or chronic nervous system problems can occur.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?

Antibiotics, such as penicillin G or ceftriaxone, can be used to treat people with meningococcal disease.

Should people who have been in contact with a diagnosed case of meningococcal meningitis be treated?

Only people who have been in close contact (household members, intimate contacts, health care personnel performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, day care center playmates, etc.) need to be considered for preventive treatment. Such people are usually advised to obtain a prescription for a special antibiotic (rifampin, ciprofloxacin or ceftriaxone) from their physician. Casual contact, as might occur in a regular classroom, office, or factory setting, is not usually significant enough to cause concern.

Is there a vaccine to prevent meningococcal meningitis?

In February 2005, the CDC recommended a new vaccine, known as Menactra, for use to prevent meningococcal disease in people 11-55 years of age. The previously licensed version of this vaccine, Memomune, is available for children 2-10 years old and adults older than 55 years. Both vaccines are 85% to 100% effective in preventing the 4 kinds of the meningococcus germ (types A, C, Y, W-135). These 4 types cause about 70% of the disease in the United States. Because the vaccines do not include type B, which accounts for about one-third of cases in adolescents, they do not prevent all cases of meningococcal disease.

Are the vaccines safe? Are there adverse side effects to the vaccine?

Both vaccines are currently available and both are safe and effective vaccines. However, both vaccines may cause mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to two days.

Who should get the meningococcal vaccine?

The vaccine is recommended for all adolescents entering middle school (11-12 years old) and high school (15 years old), and all first year college students living in dormitories. However, the vaccine will benefit all teenagers and young adults in the United States. Also at risk are people with terminal complement deficiencies or asplenia, some laboratory workers, and travelers to endemic areas of the world.

What is the duration of protection from the vaccine?

Menomune, the older vaccine, requires booster doses every 3 to 5 years. Although research is still pending, the new vaccine, Menactra, will probably not require booster doses.

How do I get more information about the meningococcal disease and vaccination?

Contact your family physician or your student health service. Additional information is also available on the websites of the New York State Department of Health, www.health.state.ny.us; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/ncid/dbmd/diseaseinfo; and the American College Health Association, www.acha.org.