



Rick Scott  
Governor

H. Frank Farmer, Jr., M.D., Ph.D.  
State Surgeon General

Dear Parents:

As children approach adolescence, they are increasingly exposed to risky or dangerous behaviors. Exposure to some behaviors are more expected than others, such as smoking and drinking. However, there are other threats they will be vulnerable to. These are vaccine-preventable diseases. The more you know about the importance of immunization, the more you can help to protect your teen from these serious diseases.

For this reason, we want to alert you to the dangers of meningococcal disease and meningococcal meningitis, bacterial infections that pose a rare but serious threat to adolescents. Here are some key things you and your teen should know:

- Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria that infect the bloodstream and linings of both the brain and spinal cord, and can cause serious illness if left untreated.
- Following childhood, rates for meningococcal disease rise again in early adolescence, peaking between the ages of 15 and 24 years.
- Although rare, meningococcal disease is particularly dangerous because it progresses so rapidly and can be fatal within hours.
- According to a recent study and government data, for people who get infected the risk of death from meningococcal disease is up to 5 times higher among 15-24 year olds, compared with younger populations.
- Up to 1 in 5 survivors of meningococcal disease will suffer from lifelong complications, including loss of limbs, hearing damage, and other neurological damage.

***Meningococcal disease develops quickly – vaccination is recommended***

In situations of close personal contact, bacteria that cause meningococcal disease can be spread through sneezing or coughing, as well as through direct contact with an infected person (such as kissing or sharing a drinking glass). The disease often begins with symptoms that can be easily mistaken for common illnesses, such as influenza. Teens should be warned to seek immediate medical attention if they develop sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, light sensitivity, or altered mental status.

- To protect young people, against meningococcal disease, the meningococcal conjugate vaccine is recommended for all 11 – 18 year olds. Children should get this vaccine at 11 – 12 years of age and a booster dose at age 16.
- It is also recommended for college freshmen living in dormitories, if not previously vaccinated

The Pasco County Health Department is committed to promoting and protecting the health of our community. Please feel free to contact our Immunization office at 727- 861-5260 for additional information or your medical provider.

Sincerely,

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Pasco County Health Department



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