

February 28, 2008

Dear Students and Parents:

On behalf of the University of Nevada, Reno and the Student Health Center, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal meningitis, a rare but potentially fatal bacterial infection, and new immunization requirements that may affect your college student.

Beginning September 1, 2008, new regulations passed by the Nevada Division of Health require that, **any freshman college student under the age of 23 may not live in on-campus housing unless vaccinated against Neisseria meningitidis (Meningococcus)** unless excused because of medical or religious reasons.

The American College Health Association supports these recommendations and further states that other college students under the age of 25 who wish to reduce their risk for the disease should be encouraged to be vaccinated.

There are 1,400 to 3,000 cases of meningococcal disease in the US each year. The mortality rate is 10-15% with 150-300 deaths per year. Adolescents and young adults account for nearly 30% of all cases of meningitis in the US. Approximately 100-125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses each year, and 5-15 students will die as a result.

Due to lifestyle factors, such as group living situations, bar patronage, active or passive smoking, and sharing of personal items, college students living in residence halls are likely to acquire meningococcal disease than the general college population.

Meningococcal infection is contagious and is spread by respiratory droplets from sneezing, coughing or close contact with an infected person. Symptoms include fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, rash, and lethargy. If not treated early, meningitis can lead to death or permanent disabilities. One in five of those who survive will suffer from long term side effects such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures, or limb amputation.

The vaccination against Meningococcal is given in one dose and provides protection against 4 of the 5 types of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Vaccinations are available on the UNR campus Student Health Center as well as local health departments. You may also contact private physician offices to check on availability.

For more information, please contact the Student Health Center at 775 784-6598. You can also find out more information about the disease and immunization at www.acha.org/meningitis or www.cdc.gov

Sincerely,
Cheryl Hug-English MD, MPH
Medical Director Student Health Center