

Virginia House Bill 2762 approved March 19, 2001, stipulates that all incoming, full-time students at four year institutions require immunization against meningococcal disease prior to enrollment. There is a provision for a waiver of this requirement if the institution of higher education provides the student, or their parent/guardian if the student is a minor, detailed information on the risks associated with meningococcal disease and the effectiveness and availability of the meningococcal vaccine. After reviewing the information below, the student or their parent/guardian, may choose not to be vaccinated against meningitis by signing and submitting the signed waiver.

WHAT IS MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid in a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. People sometimes refer to it as spinal meningitis. This disease is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Knowing whether meningitis is caused by a virus or bacterium is important because the severity of illness and the treatment differ. Viral meningitis is generally less severe and resolves with little treatment. Bacterial meningitis can be quite severe and may result in brain damage, hearing loss, learning disabilities or even death.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MENINGITIS?

Meningitis is transmitted via air droplets and/or direct contact with an infected person. Symptoms of meningitis may mimic the flu at first with high fever, headache and stiff neck. These symptoms can develop over several hours, or they may take 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting or discomfort looking at bright lights. Early diagnosis and treatment are very important so that correct treatment can be started quickly.

WHY SHOULD COLLEGE STUDENTS BE VACCINATED AGAINST MENINGITIS?

Cases of meningococcal meningitis among teens and young adults 15-25 years of age have more than doubled since 1991. Over 100 cases of meningitis occur on college campuses and at least 15 students will die from the disease. College students, especially those living in dormitories, are at an increased risk of contracting the disease because of their close proximity to each other. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), college freshmen living in dorms have a six times greater risk of contracting meningitis than college students overall. Virginia colleges have experienced meningitis outbreaks in the past; thankfully, William & Mary has not had an outbreak.

ARE THERE VACCINES TO PREVENT MENINGITIS?

Yes, there are two vaccines used against meningitis available to the college student: Menomune which affords protection for 3-5 years and has been available since 1981 and Menactra T which has been available since 2005 and offers protection for a longer span of time. These vaccines do not protect against all strains of the bacteria which cause meningitis, but they do protect against the most prevalent ones.

The meningitis vaccines are very safe, and have infrequent side effects—the most common one being soreness and redness at the site of the injection.

The vaccines may be available at your physician's office or your local health department. The Menactra T is available at the Student Health Center here at William & Mary. There will be a fee for all immunizations.

AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, A WRITTEN WAIVER MUST BE SIGNED BY THE STUDENT OR THEIR PARENT/GUARDIAN, IF THE STUDENT IS A MINOR, AND CHOOSES NOT TO BE VACCINATED AGAINST MENINGITIS.

I _____ ID # _____

(Print student's name)

have read the above detailed information on the risks associated with meningococcal disease and on the availability and effectiveness of the vaccines. I have reviewed and understand this information.

After reviewing this information on meningococcal disease and the availability and effectiveness of the vaccine, I have chosen not to be/have my child vaccinated against meningitis at this time.

_____ Date _____ DOB _____

(Signed student/parent/guardian)