

From: Ross Doman
To: Doman, Ross
Date: 5/31/2005 2:26:28 PM
Subject: RELEASE FROM THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

May 31, 2005

*** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ***

Top State Health Official Supports CDC Recommendation for Meningococcal Vaccine for Adolescents and College Freshmen

CHEYENNE - State Health Officer, Dr. Brent Sherard, today said he strongly supports the new recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for meningococcal vaccine coverage targeted towards those at highest risk for the disease.

Last week, the CDC recommended routine vaccination with a newly licensed meningococcal conjugate vaccine for children 11-12 years old, previously unvaccinated adolescents at high school entry, and college freshmen living in dormitories.

College freshmen living in the close quarters of dormitories are at a higher risk for meningococcal disease compared with peers the same age who are not attending college. Also, all other adolescents who wish to reduce their risk of disease may elect to receive vaccine.

The new vaccine is manufactured by Sanofi Pasteur and is marketed as Menactra. It was licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Jan. 14 for use in people 11-55 years of age. As the vaccine supply increases, CDC hopes, within three years, to recommend routine vaccination to all adolescents beginning at 11 years of age.

"This vaccine holds terrific promise in helping protect adolescents and college students from meningococcal disease," Sherard said. "I strongly encourage those at increased risk to get vaccinated against this very serious - and deadly - disease."

He recommended people contact their child's healthcare provider about availability and need for the vaccine.

Meningococcal disease strikes up to 3,000 Americans, killing 300 people every year. Ten to 12 percent of people with meningococcal disease die, and among survivors, up to 15 percent may suffer long-term permanent disabilities including hearing loss, limb amputation or brain damage. The disease often begins with symptoms that can be mistaken for common illnesses, such as the flu. However, meningococcal disease is particularly dangerous because it progresses rapidly and can kill within hours.

Sherard said that since 2000, 13 cases have been reported in Wyoming with one death in a 19-year old. The age ranges in the cases has been from six months to 78 years-old. Four of the cases have been in the high school / undergraduate college age range.

According to the CDC, the new vaccine should offer longer protection than previous vaccines, is a single shot, and the most common reaction is a sore arm. However, it does not protect people against meningococcal disease caused by serogroup B bacteria. This serogroup of bacteria causes one-third of meningococcal cases in the United States. More than half of the cases among infants under the age of 1 year are caused by type B, for which no vaccine is licensed or available in the United States.

.....

Meningitis Fact Sheet

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. People sometimes refer to it as spinal meningitis. Meningitis 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 without specific treatment, while bacterial meningitis can be quite severe and may result in brain damage, hearing loss, or learning disability. For bacterial meningitis, it is also important to know which type of bacteria is causing the meningitis because antibiotics can prevent some types from spreading and infecting other people. Before the 1990s, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis, but new vaccines being given to all children as part of their routine immunizations have reduced the occurrence of invasive disease due to H. influenzae. Today, Streptococcus pneumoniae and Neisseria meningitidis are the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningitis?

High fever, headache, and stiff neck are common symptoms of meningitis in anyone over the age of 2 years. These symptoms can develop over several hours, or they may take 1 to 2 days. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, discomfort looking into bright lights, confusion, and sleepiness. In newborns and small infants, the classic symptoms of fever, headache, and neck stiffness may be absent or difficult to detect, and the infant may only appear slow or inactive, or be irritable, have vomiting, or be feeding poorly. As the disease progresses, patients of any age may have seizures.

How is meningitis diagnosed?

Early diagnosis and treatment are very important. If symptoms occur, the patient should see a doctor immediately. The diagnosis is usually made by growing bacteria from a sample of spinal fluid. The spinal fluid is obtained by performing a spinal tap, in which a needle is inserted into an area in the lower back where fluid in the spinal canal is readily accessible. Identification of the type of bacteria responsible is important for selection of correct antibiotics.

Can meningitis be treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease. Appropriate antibiotic treatment of most common types of bacterial meningitis should reduce the risk of dying from meningitis to below 15%, although the risk is higher among the elderly.

Is meningitis contagious?

Yes, some forms of bacterial meningitis are contagious. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, kissing). Fortunately, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu, and they are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

However, sometimes the bacteria that cause meningitis have spread to other people who have had close or prolonged contact with a patient with meningitis caused by Neisseria meningitidis (also called meningococcal meningitis) or Hib. People in the same household or day-care center, or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of acquiring the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with meningitis caused by N. meningitidis should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease. Antibiotics for contacts of a person with Hib meningitis disease are no longer recommended if all contacts 4 years of age or younger are fully vaccinated against Hib disease (see below).

- end -

For more information, please contact Ross Doman, Public Information Officer, Wyoming Department of Health, (307) 777-6420.