

What new college students should know about bacterial meningitis

September 4 2024, by Mayo Clinic News Network



Credit: Stanley Morales from Pexels

As students head off to college, close quarters in new spaces could put them at risk for contagious illnesses, including bacterial meningitis. Dr. Tina Ardon, a Mayo Clinic family medicine physician, explains the

common ways meningitis spreads and the best way to prevent an infection.

Meningitis is a condition that inflames the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. While there are several forms of meningitis, an infection caused by bacteria is considered the most severe form, and may lead to seizures, [vision loss](#) or death if not treated quickly.

"Meningitis often presents with symptoms such as fever, a stiff neck, headache, maybe even mental status changes, and sometimes even a very distinct rash on the skin," says Dr. Ardon.

Bacterial meningitis, also known as meningitis B, can spread by sneezing or kissing, and sharing straws or drinks, among other ways. Dr. Ardon says [college students](#) are a group at higher risk for contracting meningitis due to their [living conditions](#).

"They're in a dormitory, in residence halls, spending a lot of time together in close quarters," says Dr. Ardon.

Preventing meningitis starts with two rounds of booster shots: one around 11 or 12 years old, and another at 16.

"At college age, we have the opportunity to potentially boost the dose if it's been some time and also offer another vaccine that protects against meningitis B," says Dr. Ardon.

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Citation: What new college students should know about bacterial meningitis (2024, September 4) retrieved 4 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-09-college-students-bacterial-meningitis.html>

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