

Immunizations are for college kids, too

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(Medical Xpress) -- Most parents take their young children regularly for immunization shots that protect against polio, diphtheria, measles, mumps and other diseases. But many do not consider that their college-age children also need immunizations.

"Children who are preparing for their freshman year in a dormitory are at increased risk for bacterial meningitis," says Peter N. Wenger, M.D., associate professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health, Department of Pediatrics, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - New Jersey Medical School. Each year this disease can suddenly affect up to 2,600 otherwise healthy people - with teenagers and young adults the high-risk category. Bacterial meningitis causes swelling of the brain and spinal cord and can lead to death or permanent injury. Although meningitis can be successfully treated with antibiotics, it is fatal in 10 to 14 percent of cases. In addition, nearly 20 percent of survivors end up with brain damage, amputation or kidney failure.

Meningitis is not as contagious as the flu or the common cold, but it does spread through the exchange of respiratory or throat secretions (e.g., coughing or kissing). Though scientists are not sure of the exact reason, they suspect that crowded living conditions and the sharing of utensils, drinking glasses and cigarettes are contributing factors. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommends that all first-year college students receive the meningitis [vaccine](#), which is safe, highly effective and provides three to five years of protection. Nine states, including New Jersey and Pennsylvania, require that all incoming students living on college campuses either have a vaccination or sign a waiver stating they choose not to be vaccinated for this disease.

Dr. Wenger recommends that college students also consider these vaccines:

• HPV (human papilloma virus), which

protects against the viruses that cause most cervical cancers, anal cancer, and genital warts.

• Tdap (Tetanus, [Diphtheria](#), and Pertussis), which is given as a one-time dose to adolescents and adults and protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (also known as whooping cough).

• Hepatitis A, which protects against this serious [disease](#) caused by a virus that attacks the liver.

• An annual immunization against influenza.

• Any vaccines not offered when the child was an infant, such as varicella against chicken pox, if the child had not already acquired wild-type chicken pox.

If your busy, college-bound children can't squeeze in a doctor's visit before setting off for school, make sure one of their first stops is the college's office of student health.

Provided by University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey

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