

August 29, 2005

Dear Parents:

If you are the parent of an adolescent or college-bound student, Pittsylvania County Schools Division wants to be sure you are aware that adolescents and some college students are at increased risk for a potentially fatal bacterial infection, called meningococcal disease. This bacterial infection can lead to meningitis, which causes swelling of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord, or to a serious blood infection.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends meningococcal vaccination at:

- 11 to 12 years old during the pre-adolescent doctor's visit, or
- High school entry, or
- College freshmen living in dormitories.

We encourage parents to learn more about these recommendations, meningococcal disease and the potential benefits of immunization for their adolescent or college bound child. Meningococcal disease is spread through air droplets and by direct contact with an infected person. Early symptoms may resemble the flu, making diagnosis difficult. The disease can progress very quickly, killing an otherwise healthy young person in 48 hours or less. Over 50 percent of meningococcal disease in the U.S. occurs in persons 11 years of age or older. Disease rates begin to rise early in adolescence and peak between the ages of 15 and 24.

Ten to fourteen percent of cases are fatal; however, among adolescents that figure can be as high as 22 percent. Up to 1 in 5 of those who survive will suffer permanent effects that may include hearing loss, brain damage or limb amputations.

However, up to 83 percent of meningococcal infections among this age group are potentially vaccine-preventable. Vaccination is safe and effective, and can protect individuals against four of the five serogroups (A, C, Y and W-135) of *N. meningitidis*, the bacterium that causes meningococcal disease.

We encourage you and your adolescent or college-bound child to learn more about this disease and to speak with your physician about vaccination. For your information, enclosed is a flyer with more information about meningococcal disease and vaccination. Or you can visit the following Web sites: www.cdc.gov, www.aap.org, www.aafp.org or www.acha.org.

For more information about where to obtain immunization for your child, please contact/visit the local health department or your private physician.

Sincerely,

Lillian D. Holland, Assistant Superintendent for Support Services

C: James E. McDaniel, Superintendent