

The Georgia General Assembly passed legislation requiring public and nonpublic postsecondary educational institutions to give students residing in campus housing information about meningococcal disease and vaccine. Students are required to sign a document provided by the postsecondary institution stating that they have received a vaccination against meningococcal disease or reviewed the information and declined to be vaccinated. The governor signed the legislation on May 28, 2003; effective January 1, 2004 (Official Code of Georgia Annotated §31-12-3.2). Please carefully read the information below and sign the housing contract and return as directed.

Meningococcal Disease Facts

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection caused by bacteria, most commonly causing meningitis (an infection of the membranes that surround the spinal cord and brain) or sepsis (an infection of blood that affects many organ systems).

College freshmen, particularly those living in dorms, have a modestly increased risk of getting the disease compared with other persons of the same age. Up to 100 cases occur among the 15 million college students in the United States each year, with 5-15 deaths. However, the overall risk of disease, even among college students, is low.

Crowded living conditions and smoking (active or passive) are additional risk factors that are potentially modifiable.

Bacteria are spread from person-to-person through secretions from the mouth and nose, transmitted through close contact. Casual contact or breathing in the same air space is not considered sufficient for transmission.

Common symptoms include: stiff neck, headache, fever, sensitivity to light, sleepiness, confusion, and seizures. Invasive meningococcal disease, or blood infection with the organism, causes fever and rash.

The disease can be treated with antibiotics, but treatment must be started early. Even with treatment, some patients may die. Survivors may be left with severe disability such as the loss of a limb.

A meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine is available for those who wish to pay for it.

Vaccine protects against 4 of the 5 most common types of meningococcal bacteria and protection typically lasts 3-5 years.

Vaccination may decrease the risk of meningococcal disease; however, it does not eliminate the risk because the vaccine does not protect against all types of meningococcal bacteria. Approximately 50-70% of disease among college students is likely to be vaccine-preventable.

Vaccine may be available at travel clinics, health departments, student health services, or through private providers. Prices may vary.