

Meningitis Immunization for Adolescents

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

[Susan Laird] Welcome to this podcast on meningitis immunizations for adolescents. I'm Susan Laird, your host.

Here to discuss this topic is Dr. Tom Clark, an epidemiologist with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. Thanks for coming, Dr. Clark.

[Dr. Clark] Well, thank you for having me.

[Susan Laird] So, tell us about meningococcal disease.

[Dr. Clark] Well, meningococcal disease is an infection caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. It can be a life-threatening infection. People may be most familiar with this germ as a cause of meningitis, but there are other forms of the disease as well. Meningitis makes up about half of all cases. Other infections can occur, even though they're less common. For example, bloodstream infection, with or without meningitis and pneumonia can also occur. In meningitis, the infection causes inflammation of the protective fluid and lining around the brain and the spinal cord which are called the meninges. Symptoms include fever, severe headache, neck stiffness, rash, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and sleepiness. Meningitis is serious, so people who develop these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

[Susan Laird] Is viral meningitis different from bacterial meningitis?

[Dr. Clark] It is. Several bacteria can cause meningitis; meningococcal meningitis is one of the most important and most serious. But, meningitis can also be caused by viruses. About 90 percent of viral meningitis is caused by viruses known as enteroviruses. Viral meningitis is more common during the summer and the fall and can be serious, but is rarely fatal in people with normal immune systems. It sometimes requires hospitalization, but usually clears up within days, often without treatment.

[Susan Laird] So, is meningococcal disease—meaning the bacterial infection—a serious condition?

[Dr. Clark] Yes, it is. Meningococcal meningitis and blood stream infections can be very serious, even deadly. The infection progresses rapidly, sometimes in 48 hours or less, and even with antibiotic treatment, many people who are infected die or develop serious disabilities.

[Susan Laird] How many cases of meningococcal disease do we have each year in the United States?

[Dr. Clark] Well thankfully, meningococcal disease is not very common. Each year, about 3,000 people in the U.S. get it. Adolescents die about 10 percent of the time, and one in four survivors

has long-term disability, such as a loss of an arm or leg, deafness, nervous system problems, or even brain damage.

[Susan Laird] So, what should parents do to protect their children from meningococcal disease?

[Dr. Clark] Getting adolescents vaccinated can help protect them against meningitis and can potentially save their life. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, also known as the ACIP, recommends one dose of meningococcal vaccine for all adolescents aged 11-18 years, at the earliest opportunity. Ideally, the meningitis vaccine should be given at the 11-12 year old check-up.

[Susan Laird] Does the meningitis vaccine have side effects?

[Dr. Clark] Side effects from the vaccine are usually mild, such as a soreness, swelling, or redness where the shot was given, and maybe a mild fever or headache. Serious side effects are rare.

[Susan Laird] What other vaccines are recommended for adolescents?

[Dr. Clark] Well, many parents believe that vaccinations are just for little kids and that their child is done with their vaccinations when they reach adolescence. But adolescents between the ages of 11 and 19 need vaccinations to boost their protection against pertussis – also known as whooping cough, tetanus, diphtheria, and meningococcal disease. Girls need the human papillomavirus, or HPV vaccine to protect them against cervical cancer. Parents should check with their healthcare provider to see if their adolescent needs any immunizations.

[Susan Laird] Dr. Clark, do you have any advice for families who are concerned about how much the vaccines cost?

[Dr. Clark] Well, for families with health insurance, their insurance often covers the cost of all the recommended vaccines. Children aged 18 and younger may be eligible to get the vaccines at no cost through the Vaccines for Children, or VFC program, if they're Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, American Indian, or Alaska native.

[Susan Laird] Where can our listeners get more information about the VFC program and about vaccines, in general?

[Dr. Clark] Parents can find a VFC provider by contacting their local health department. Listeners can get more information about vaccines at www.cdc.gov/vaccines.

[Susan Laird] Thank you, Dr. Clark, for sharing this information with our listeners today.

[Dr. Clark] Well, thank you for having me, and please remember to have adolescents vaccinated. It could save their lives.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.