

Influenza and Meningitis Education and Awareness

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www.cdc.gov/flu www.cdc.gov/meningococcal

Influenza, General

We are currently in the middle of flu season, and 2013/2014 is proving to be a doozy! On December 28, 2013, Louisiana was classified as a "Wide-Spread Influenza Activity State". Flu viruses are spread by respiratory droplets carried by infected persons when they cough, sneeze, or even talk. You can also contract the flu virus by touching an infected surface and then placing your hands in your nose, mouth, or eyes. Infected persons may be contagious for up to 7 days. Elderly people, young children, and those with compromised immune systems are most susceptible to the flu.

Influenza Prevention

The CDC recommends a three-step approach to fighting influenza (flu):

1. *Get The Flu Vaccine Every Year:* It is NOT too late to get the vaccine this year. It usually takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to become effective against the flu. Vaccine recipients may experience very minor flu-like symptoms for 12-24 hours after taking the shot, but the vast majority do not.
2. *Treat Flu Like Symptoms Early, But Understand the Limits:* Anti-viral drugs can be effective if they are started within 48 hours of the start of flu-like symptoms. Experts agree that until you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of any medication (Ibuprofen, Tylenol, Aspirin), you are contagious and should not co-mingle with others.
3. *Practice Preventative Measures Every Day:*
 - Avoid contact with sick people (stay at least 3 feet away from them)
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
 - Wash your hands often with antibacterial soap or even waterless hand sanitizer
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent the spread of germs
 - Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that are touched often.

Meningitis, General

Meningitis (or Meningococcal Disease) is a condition that causes an inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis can be caused by either viruses or bacteria, but a doctor must perform tests to determine which.

- *Viral Meningitis* is more common. It causes patients to exhibit symptoms such as a stiff neck, headache, nausea, vomiting, and an unexplained rash. Like most viruses, there is no treatment and viral meningitis usually runs its course without great complications.
- *Bacterial Meningitis*, although more rare, can cause grave illness and even rapidly progress to death if not aggressively treated early in its progression.

Meningitis, Methods of Transmission and Risks

Meningitis occurring in college-aged students is usually caused by activities that involve the spread of saliva (sharing cigarettes, sharing drinks, kissing, and other intimate contact involving oral secretions). Meningococcal bacteria cannot survive outside of the human body for more than a few minutes, so this disease is not easily spread in water supplies or through routine contact in classrooms, dining room, restroom, etc. Since meningitis can be mistaken for other conditions, it is important for anyone

exhibiting symptoms (stiff neck, headache, nausea, vomiting, unexplained rash) to seek medical attention quickly.

Meningitis Vaccine and Prevention

Immunization against meningitis is available with limitations. The vaccine is only effective against 4 out of the 5 serogroups (strains) of meningitis bacteria. Recent cases of meningitis in New Jersey and California Universities were confirmed to be originating from the strain that the vaccine is not effective against. So even though the vaccine is recommended, the best preventative measures against meningitis are lifestyle related:

- Eat a balanced diet, drink lots of water, get adequate sleep.
- Don't smoke and avoid the inhalation of smoke.
- Avoid activities that have any potential for sharing oral secretions, such as "double dipping" chips and snacks, sharing any beverages with others, sharing cigarettes.
- Do not kiss or have intimate contact with anyone that is displaying any symptoms or feeling sick

Additional Information for Employees and Students at UL Lafayette

1. The University has a Pandemic Flu Emergency Plan. Please familiarize yourself with this plan by visiting www.safety.louisiana.edu (click on "Training").
2. First time freshman are required to have the meningitis vaccine as a condition of being admitted to the University. Learn more about this by visiting: www.louisiana.edu/admissions/first-time-freshmen
3. Learn more about Flu, Meningitis, and all Communicable Diseases by visiting:
Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov
The World Health Organization: www.who.org
The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals: <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov>