



### *Meningitis: Should your child be immunized?*

New public health recommendations have been issued to help protect teenagers and college students against a potentially fatal bacterial infection, called meningococcal disease, commonly referred to as meningitis.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends routine meningococcal immunization at the preadolescent doctor's visit (11 to 12 years old). For those teenagers who have not been previously vaccinated, immunization also is recommended at high school entry and for incoming college freshmen living in dormitories (only one shot required).

Meningococcal disease is a dangerous bacterial infection that can strike teenagers and college students. The disease can progress rapidly and within hours of the first symptoms, may result in death or permanent disability, including brain damage, organ failure, loss of hearing and limb amputations. Research shows teenagers have an unusually high death rate; nearly one in four cases is fatal among this age group.

The good news is that immunization may help to protect against up to 83 percent of cases among teenagers and college students. A conjugate meningococcal vaccine is now available that public health officials anticipate will provide longer protection against the disease.

“Symptoms of meningococcal disease often resemble the flu and can include a fever, headache, nausea and stiff neck, making the disease difficult to diagnose,” said Somerset Academy. “That’s why it’s so important for parents to be aware of the disease and consider immunization for their teenagers and college-bound children.”

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are transmitted through air droplets and by direct contact with an infected person (e.g., kissing, coughing). Due to lifestyle factors, such as crowded living situations (sleep-away camps, dorms), sharing personal items (e.g., utensils, drinking glasses), active or passive cigarette smoking and irregular sleep patterns, teenagers and college students are more likely to contract meningococcal disease than the general population. In fact, this age group accounts for nearly 30 percent of all cases in the U.S.

“Parents at Somerset Academy should be aware of the CDC’s immunization recommendations for meningococcal disease and talk to their child’s health care provider about vaccination.”

To find out more about meningococcal disease and immunization contact your family’s health care provider or visit the CDC Web site at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).