



Dear Student,

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Dear Student:

As the college health service director at Niagara County Community College, I am writing to inform you about meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection commonly referred to as meningitis, and a law in New York State. New York State Public Health Law (NYS PHL) 2167 requires institutions, including colleges and universities, to distribute information about

Meningococcal Disease

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. Meningitis is usually caused by a viral or bacterial infection. Knowing whether meningitis is caused by a virus or bacterium is important because the severity of illness and the treatment differ.

In the United States, the disease strikes approximately 600 ±1,000 people every year and of those, 10-15% die from the disease. Among those who survive, approximately 1 in 5 live with permanent disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing loss, loss of kidney function, or limb amputations. Studies suggest that outbreaks on college campuses may occur because students live and work in close proximity to each other in dormitories and classrooms. The student's lifestyle may also contribute to risk. Exposure to active and passive smoking, alcohol consumption and bar patronage (with or without alcohol consumption) all increase the chance of contracting meningitis from an infected person. It is estimated that 37 to 69 cases of meningococcal disease occur annually on college campuses and 2 to 4 students die as a result.

*Historically, the number of meningococcal disease cases has gone up and down over time. Now, the number of cases is at the lowest it has ever been. Health officials believe this is due, in part, to the increased use of meningococcal vaccines.

What are the signs and symptoms of meningitis?

Early symptoms include fever, severe headache, stiff neck, rash, nausea, vomiting, and lethargy, and may resemble the flu. Because the disease progresses rapidly, often in as little as 12 hours, students are urged to seek medical care immediately if they experience two or more of these symptoms concurrently. Even when they are treated with antibiotics, 10%-14% of these die. Of those who live, another 11%-19% lose their arms or legs, have problems with their nervous systems, become deaf or mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes. The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

Can meningitis be treated?

Bacterial meningitis can be treated with a number of effective antibiotics. It is important, however, that treatment be started early in the course of the disease to avoid death or permanent disabilities. One in five of those who survive will suffer from long-term side effects such as brain damage, hearing loss, seizures, or limb amputation.

Is meningitis contagious?

Yes. Meningococcal disease is contagious and progresses very rapidly. The bacteria are spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (i.e., coughing, sneezing). The bacteria also can be transmitted through direct contact with an infected person, such as kissing. People in the same household or day-care center, or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions (such as a boyfriend or girlfriend) would be considered at increased risk of acquiring the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with meningitis caused by *N. meningitidis*

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