

Important Information and Registration Requirement regarding Meningococcal Meningitis

Bacterial meningitis continues to be a serious health concern and the Texas Legislature has enacted another meningitis-related law that may affect you as a Rice student.

1. Registration Requirement. State law now requires most “entering students” to be vaccinated against bacterial meningitis. This law applies to you if you are **under the age of 22, and either:**

- you will be a first-time student at Rice on or after January 1, 2012; OR
- you attended a higher education institution before January 1, 2012 and are enrolling after a break in enrollment of at least one fall or spring semester.

If you fall into either of these two categories (including, for example, new students, transfer students, or students returning from leave), the new law requires that at least 10 days before the start of the semester you provide Rice proof that you received the vaccination or a booster in the preceding five-years. Some limited exemptions are allowed under the law (<http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.51.htm#51.9191>). If this law applies to you, proof or exemption paperwork must be filed with Student Health Services (<http://health.rice.edu>) no later than 10 days before the semester starts. Plan ahead to be sure you comply in advance of the new semester, or the process can be time-consuming. **All affected students must comply before they are allowed to register.**

Vaccinations can be obtained from your chosen health care provider. Even if you are not required by law to present proof of vaccination or exemption, you nonetheless may wish to consult your personal physician about receiving the vaccination to prevent the disease.

2. Additional Meningococcal Meningitis Information. State law also requires Rice to provide you the attached important information about meningococcal meningitis. Please review it and, as required by law, we ask that you confirm your receipt of this notice by sending a blank reply to annualnotice@rice.edu.

Meningococcal meningitis, a form of bacterial meningitis, is a serious disease that can progress very quickly. This disease strikes about 3,000 people in the U.S. each year, including 100 to 125 on college campuses, and leads to 5 to 15 deaths annually among college students. Possible consequences of disease include death (which can occur within 8 to 24 hours after becoming ill); permanent brain damage; kidney failure; hearing loss; blindness; limb damage requiring amputation; gangrene; convulsions, and coma. Some symptoms include fever, severe headaches, nausea, sensitivity to light, seizures, stiff neck, rash or purple skin patches. Early diagnosis can be made by a medical provider and is usually based on a combination of clinical symptoms and laboratory results. Early diagnosis and treatment, though no guarantee against permanent disability or death, can greatly improve the likelihood of recovery.

Meningococcal meningitis can be transmitted when people exchange saliva when sharing cigarettes, water bottles, eating utensils, food, kissing, etc. and by living in close conditions or contacting respiratory or throat secretions. First-year college students living on college campuses have approximately a five-fold increased risk than do other students.

Vaccinations are effective against four of the five most common types of the disease but do not protect against all types of meningococcal meningitis or other forms of bacterial meningitis. Vaccinations take 7 to 10 days to become effective and protection lasts from three to five years. The vaccination is very safe, with only minor side effects.

Important Information about Meningococcal Meningitis

This information is being provided to college students in the state of Texas. Meningococcal meningitis, a form of bacterial meningitis, is a serious, potentially deadly disease that can progress extremely fast. It is an inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord. The bacterium that causes meningococcal meningitis can also infect the blood. Although rare, this disease strikes about 3,000 Americans each year, including 100 to 125 on college campuses, leading to five to 15 deaths among college students every year. There is a treatment, but those who survive may develop severe health problems or disabilities.

What are the symptoms?

- High fever • Severe headaches • Nausea
- Vomiting • Light sensitivity • Confusion and sleepiness
- Stiff Neck • Rash or purple patches on skin • Seizures

There may be a rash of tiny, red-purple spots caused by bleeding under the skin. These can occur anywhere on the body. The more symptoms, the higher the risk. If these symptoms appear, seek immediate medical attention.

How is meningococcal meningitis diagnosed?

- Diagnosis is made by a medical provider and is usually based on a combination of clinical symptoms and laboratory results from spinal fluid and blood tests.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can greatly improve the likelihood of recovery.

How is the disease transmitted?

- The disease is transmitted when people exchange saliva (such as by kissing or by sharing drinking containers, utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, etc.) or come in contact with respiratory or throat secretions.

What increases the risk of getting meningococcal meningitis?

- Exposure to saliva by sharing cigarettes, water bottles, eating utensils, food, kissing, etc.
- Living in close conditions (such as sharing a room/suite in a dorm or group home).
- First-year college students living on campus have approximately a five-fold increased risk versus other students.

What are the possible consequences of the disease?

- Death (*which can occur as quickly as eight to 24 hours after becoming ill*) • Permanent brain damage • Kidney failure • Learning disability • Hearing loss, blindness • Limb damage (fingers, toes, arms, legs) that requires amputation • Gangrene • Coma
- Convulsions

Can the disease be treated?

- Antibiotic treatment, if received early, may save lives and increase the chance of recovery. However, permanent disability or death can still occur despite early and appropriate treatment.
- Vaccinations are effective against four of the five most common types that cause 70 percent of meningococcal disease in the U.S. (but does not protect against all types of meningococcal meningitis or other forms of bacterial meningitis).
- Vaccinations take seven to 10 days to become effective, with protection lasting three to five years.
- The cost of the vaccine varies, so check with your health care provider.
- Vaccination is very safe — most common side effects are redness and minor pain at injection site for up to two days.
- Vaccinations are available through a health care provider of your choosing.

Vaccinations

All first-time and transfer students must provide documentation of meningococcal vaccination. This is a Texas state law. Vaccination must occur 10 days or more in advance of orientation week (or planned on-campus arrival date). A student who is delinquent in this requirement will not be permitted to move on-campus. More information on the law (including exemptions to immunization requirements) can be found at the Texas Department of State Health Services website (<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/immunize/school/default.shtm#news>).

How can I find out more information?

- Contact your own health care provider.
- Contact the Morton L. Rich Health Center (ext. 4966) (www.health.rice.edu).
- Contact your local or regional Texas Department of Health office at 888-963-7111 (www.dshs.state.tx.us/).
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 800-232-4636 (www.cdc.gov/meningitis/index.html).
- Contact the American College Health Association at 410-859-1500