State Public Health Dept Advises Meningitis B Vaccine for Students

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The Department of Public Health in Massachusetts is recommending that all Hampshire and Five Colleges students become vaccinated for Meningitis B, as complications from the infection can be very serious. This is in response to the diagnosis of three cases affecting Five Colleges students: One case of meningococcal disease caused by serotype B in a Smith College student over the weekend of February 24-25 and two cases in October and November 2017 of students at UMass Amherst. It is not known if these cases are related, and the state public health department is actively investigating and coordinating with medical staff of the Five Colleges, which had previously issued our own recommendation for students to be vaccinated.

There are no known cases of Meningitis at Hampshire College and investigations to date have not found that the Smith student had any close contact with any Hampshire students. However, we continue to strongly encourage all students to be vaccinated for Meningitis B. About 200 Hampshire College students have been vaccinated already.

We are able to bill health insurance providers for the cost of the vaccine, so students do not need to pay for it. Hampshire Health Services is administering the Bexsero brand Meningitis B vaccine, a two-dose series administered at least one month apart. Important to note, it is not the same as the meningitis vaccine required of students for entry to college, known as the MCV4 (usually Menactra), which does not protect against Meningitis B.

Students, please call campus Health Services at 413-559-5458 to schedule an appointment if you haven’t already. Vaccines are also available at most local pharmacies. Health Services is also hoping to reach more students by holding a large-scale Meningitis B vaccine clinic on campus on Wednesday March 21, after spring break.

Some students may want to be vaccinated while at home over spring break. You can also use Vaccinefinder.org to locate local pharmacy options. Be sure to mention to your health insurance provider that the Five Colleges are in a "meningitis B outbreak," because insurance will cover the full cost of the vaccine in an outbreak declared by state health authorities.

ABOUT BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

Symptoms of meningococcal disease can first appear as a flu-like illness and rapidly worsen into a very serious meningitis infection. Meningitis is not easily spread like the common cold or flu. It is spread through close contact, so students are encouraged to avoid sharing drinks, water bottles, lip-balm, or smoking materials and to cover all coughs and sneezes, and wash hands thoroughly.

More information on bacterial meningitis is available here from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/ meningococcal/outbreaks/index.html. Additional information is also listed on our Web site at www.hampshire.edu/health-services/health-and-counseling-services.

Students with health questions or concerns are encouraged to call Hampshire Health Services at 413-559-5458; our main office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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https://intranet.hampshire.edu/content/state-public-health-dept-advises-meningitis-b-vaccine-for-students