New York State Department of Health
Bureau of Communicable Disease Control
Meningococcal Disease

What is Meningococcal disease?
Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection of the blood stream or meninges (a thin lining covering the brain and spinal cord).

Who gets Meningococcal disease?
Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is more common in infants and children. For some college student, such as freshmen living in dormitories, there is an increased risk of meningococcal disease. Between 100 and 125 cases of meningococcal disease occur on college campuses every year in the United States; between 5 and 15 college students die each year as a result of infection, currently, no data are available regarding whether children at overnight camps or residential schools are at the same increased risk for disease. However, these children can be in settings similar to college freshman living in dormitories. Other persons at increased risk include household contact of a person known to have this disease, and people traveling to parts of the world where meningitis is prevalent.

How is the germ Meningococcus spread?
The meningococcus germ is spread by direct contact with nose or throat discharges of an infected person. Many people carry this particular germ in their nose and throat without any sings of illness, while others may develop serious symptoms.

What are the symptoms?
High fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash are symptoms of meningococcal disease. Among people who develop meningococcal disease, 10-15% die, In spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, kidney failure, loss of arms or legs, or chronic nervous system problems can occur.

How soon do the symptoms appear?
The symptoms may appear two to 10 days after exposure, but usually within five days.

What is the treatment for meningococcal disease?
Antibiotics, such as penicillin G or ceftriaxon can be used to treat people with meningococcal disease.

Is there a vaccine to prevent Meningococcal disease?
Yes, a safe and effective vaccine is available. The vaccine is 85%-100% effective in preventing four kinds of bacteria (serogroups A, C, Y, W-135) that cause about 70% of the diseases in the United States. The vaccine is safe, with mild and infrequent side effects, such as redness and pain at the injection site lasting up to 2 days. After vaccination, immunity develops within 7-10 days and remains effective for approximately 3 to 5 years.[As with any vaccine against meningitis may not protect 100% of all susceptible individuals.]

How do I get more Information about meningococcal disease and vaccination?
Contact your family physician or your student health services office. Additional information is also available on the websites of the New York state department of health www.health.state.ny.us; the Centers for disease control and prevention www.cdc.gov/ncid/dbmd/diseaseinfo; and the American College Health Association, www.acha.org.

Vaccinations are available from your primary care physician or visit CDC Travel Clinic website for clinics that have Meningitis vaccine available. This cost is approximately $75.00.