

Frequently Asked Questions: Serogroup B Meningococcal Disease

1. What has happened?

Two undergraduate UMass Amherst students have developed serogroup B meningococcal disease during the fall semester. This life-threatening infection can result in meningitis (swelling of the covering of the brain and spinal cord) and a bloodstream infection. Because the disease can be so serious, we have given antibiotics to people who had close contact with the two sick students. These antibiotics will temporarily prevent those close contacts from also getting sick. Vaccinations for serogroup B meningococcal disease have also been administered through University Health Services by appointment.

It has been determined by a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention laboratory that the strains of meningococcal bacteria that caused both students' infections are closely related. This means that there may be an increased risk of meningococcal disease for other undergraduates on campus. **We recommend that all undergraduate students get vaccinated to help prevent further cases.** In order to accomplish this in the shortest time frame, additional large-scale walk-in vaccination clinics located in the Student Union are scheduled for:

- **November 30th from 12–6 p.m., first and second-year students preferred**
- **December 1st from 12–6 p.m., first and second-year students preferred**
- **December 4th 12–6 p.m., third and fourth-year students preferred**
- **December 5th 12–6 p.m., third and fourth-year students preferred**

To make this process as orderly as possible for everyone involved, we encourage you to follow the suggested day or participation, but we understand if your schedule makes that difficult. Graduate students and others in the highest risk group should select any of the four days.

2. Who should get vaccinated?

UHS strongly recommends that the following students get serogroup B meningococcal vaccinations:

- **All undergraduate students**
- **All students living in undergraduate housing**
- **All students with conditions such as asplenia, a complement deficiency, or sickle cell anemia or those taking the medication Solaris**

This includes all on or off campus students.

3. Should I receive the serogroup B meningococcal vaccine series?

University Health Services strongly recommends that all undergraduate students and all students living in undergraduate housing receive vaccinations for serogroup B meningococcal disease.

- ## 4. I am a visiting student from Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mt Holyoke College, Smith College, or Amherst Regional High School. Should I get vaccinated against serogroup B meningococcal disease?

At this time, the serogroup B meningococcal vaccine is recommended for students who take classes on the UMass campus. If others would like to be vaccinated, we recommend that you check with your primary care provider or your school's health service regarding availability of the vaccine.

5. I received a meningococcal ('meningitis') vaccine when I was in high school, doesn't that protect me?

It is important to understand that meningococcal B (MenB) vaccines are fairly new (approved by the FDA in 2014 and 2015), and most college students have not received it previously. However, all college students have been required to receive a vaccine that protects against four other serogroups of meningococcal disease (A, C, W, Y). That vaccine does not protect against serogroup B, which is the cause of current infections at UMass. Consequently, it is important for students to be vaccinated now with a MenB vaccine.

6. Should faculty, staff, and graduate students get vaccinated?

We recommend that only faculty and graduate students or staff with conditions such as asplenia, a complement deficiency, those who take the medication Solaris, or have sickle cell anemia, who are at greater risk of becoming infected if exposed, get vaccinated. CDC recommends people with these conditions get both types of meningitis vaccines regardless of an outbreak. We recommend that any faculty or staff who wish to get vaccinated contact your health care provider.

7. What should I do if I have had close contact with a person who has meningococcal disease

If you have had a close contact with a person who has been diagnosed with meningococcal disease, you should come to University Health Services to get antibiotics to protect you from also getting sick. Close contact includes activities such as kissing, sneezing or coughing on someone, sharing water bottles, lipsticks, mouth pieces on musical instruments, sharing eating/drinking utensils, or sharing cigarettes/e-cigarettes with someone who got sick.

Students in contact with the two known cases were contacted by UHS immediately to get the antibiotic.

8. Is it safe for students to go home to visit family or travel off campus?

Health officials do not recommend any travel restrictions for members of the University community.

9. Are there any places on campus I should avoid?

The bacteria that causes meningococcal disease cannot live outside of the body for very long. There is no evidence that says you are at risk of catching the infection by touching surfaces like doorknobs, keyboards, or exercise equipment that someone who is sick touched. Sharing facilities like a cafeteria, gym, or classroom also does not put someone at increased risk of infection. However, hand washing and covering your cough or sneeze are good hygiene practices to follow.

10. How is meningococcal disease spread?

Neisseria meningitidis, the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease, generally spread through direct exchange of respiratory and throat aerosols and secretions by close personal contact. The bacteria are more easily spread in crowded settings such as parties and bars, etc. Sharing smoking articles by passing a joint, pipe, bong, or hookah can directly spread the bacteria. Drinking by shared cups, funnels, or other drinking games using shared utensils that contact the mouth also can spread the bacteria. Smoking cigarettes/e-cigarettes/marijuana/hookahs damages the lining of the throat and increases the risk of developing meningococcal disease.

11. How can I prevent against the spread of meningococcal disease?

- Don't SHARE: cups, utensils, lipstick, cigarettes/e-cigarettes – anything containing saliva!
- Get vaccinated against meningococcal disease if you are an undergraduate at UMass University
- Don't smoke
- Cough into a sleeve or tissue
- Wash or sanitize your hands often

12. What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection that typically occurs as meningitis (brain infection) and/or septicemia (bloodstream infection).

13. What causes meningococcal disease?

The bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis* are the cause of meningococcal disease. Four *Neisseria meningitidis* serogroups (C, W, Y and B) cause most cases of meningococcal disease in the United States. Because most current college students have been vaccinated against types C, W and Y, serogroup B has been the cause of all meningococcal disease outbreaks on college campuses in the last few years.

14. What are the symptoms?

Meningococcal disease can progress rapidly. You could feel fine one day and be in the hospital the next. Early symptoms are difficult to distinguish from other more common infections like influenza (the flu).

Meningitis symptoms:	Septicemia (meningococemia) symptoms:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sudden onset of fever• Headache• Stiff neck• Confusion• Photophobia (sensitivity to light)• Nausea/vomiting• Drowsiness• When meningococemia (bloodstream infection) is also present, a dark purple or red rash may be present	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sudden onset of fever• Fatigue• Vomiting• Cold hands and feet• Cold chills• Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest or abdomen (belly)• Rapid breathing• Diarrhea• Dark purple or red rash may be present

Most people exposed to the bacteria only carry it in their throats for a short period of time and do not become ill. If illness occurs, it typically happens within a few days of exposure to the bacteria. The disease is unpredictable, and no one really knows all the reasons why some carriers become sick while others do not and why some people have more severe disease than others. **Seek medical attention immediately if you develop symptoms of meningococcal disease.**

15. If I still have questions about meningococcal disease or receiving the vaccine, how do I get more information?

To speak to a UHS triage advice nurse, please call 413-577-5229. Calls to this number will be returned from 8 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. For further information, you may call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at 617-983-6800.

If you would like more information about meningococcal disease please visit:

1. <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/cdc/factsheets/m-o/meningococcal-college-students.pdf>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/downloads/17-275138D-MeningococcalDis-B-Outbreak-FS.pdf>
3. See our website www.umass.edu/meningitis

About the Serogroup B Meningococcal Vaccine and Campus Clinics

How do I get vaccinated at UMass?

In this first phase of campus clinics, University Health Services (UHS) is hosting a series of walk-in immunization clinics conveniently located in the Cape Cod Lounge in the Student Union. No appointment is necessary, please remember to bring your insurance card.

The walk-in clinics will be located at the Cape Cod Lounge and are scheduled for:

- **November 30th from 12-6 p.m., first and second-year students preferred**
- **December 1st from 12-6 p.m., first and second-year students preferred**
- **December 4th 12-6 p.m., third and fourth-year students preferred**
- **December 5th 12-6 p.m., third and fourth-year students preferred**

Is there enough vaccine for all the targeted students?

We will have an ample supply of vaccine for all those who wish to receive it. We have been assured by the manufacturer that there are no shortages.

Who should receive the vaccine? Is it required?

UHS strongly recommends all undergraduate students and all students living in undergraduate housing on campus receive vaccinations for serogroup B meningococcal disease. Anyone with asplenia, sickle cell disease, a complement deficiency, or who are taking the medication Solaris should also be vaccinated. Requirements for matriculation to school are set by the state health department; at this time the state recommends, but does not require, that students be vaccinated against serogroup B meningococcal disease.

I'm an undergraduate student but I do not think I need to get vaccinated because I don't attend many parties or engage in other higher risk behaviors. Do I still need to get vaccinated?

UHS recommends that all undergraduates get vaccinated regardless of whether you engage in high risk behaviors such as sharing saliva through drinking or smoking materials.

What vaccines are available for meningococcal disease?

Two MenB vaccines were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2014 and 2015. Either one can be used during an outbreak:

- Bexsero® is a two-dose series administered a least one month apart from each other.
- Trumenba® is a three-dose series administer at 0, 1, and 6 months apart from each other.

It is important to note that the two vaccines are not interchangeable; if you start with one vaccine the series must be completed with the same vaccine.

There is no preference in terms of effectiveness for one vaccine over the other. UHS will primarily be using Bexsero® because of its shorter administration schedule.

Most students have already been vaccinated with one of the two FDA approved vaccines against four serogroups: A, C, W, Y (MCV4) meningococcal conjugate vaccines. These vaccines have been available for many years and are required for matriculation to college:

- Menveo®
- Menactra®

What vaccine will be administered at the vaccination clinic on campus?

The vaccination clinic will be administering Bexsero® vaccine. This is a two-dose series, administered **at least one month apart**.

How will the students receive the second dose of Bexsero® vaccine?

UHS will provide vaccinations by appointment throughout December. After the winter intersession a series of walk – in clinics will be held to administer the second dose of the Bexsero® vaccine. Please check our website for the most current information. <https://www.umass.edu/uhs/>

When does the second dose need to be administered?

The second dose of Bexsero® should be administered no sooner than one month after the first dose, it is acceptable to receive the second dose at home during winter break or upon return to campus in the spring semester. UHS will be offering walk-in clinics early in the spring semester. The important thing to remember is that the two MenB vaccines are not interchangeable: if your first dose was Bexsero® your second dose must also be Bexsero. Please check our website frequently for updated information regarding dates and times at: <https://www.umass.edu/uhs/>

What if I received the Trumenba vaccine, will I be able to continue the series when I'm back at school?

Yes, UHS will also have a supply of Trumenba available for those students who are vaccinated with that vaccine. Please call 577-5101 and schedule an appointment for Trumenba.

What is the cost of receiving the first and second dose of the Bexsero® meningococcal vaccine on campus?

The cost to receive the first or second Bexsero® meningococcal vaccine will be billed to the student's health insurance.

Insurance Tips:

- Check with your insurance provider regarding their coverage of the vaccine.
- When speaking with your insurance representative, it is important to mention that the UMass campus has been designated an “outbreak” status by federal and state public health officials.
- Students 18 years old or younger will receive free state supplied vaccine through the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Immunization Program. These students' health insurance will be billed an administration fee.
- Many insurance companies will require that vaccines are given by an in-network provider. See information on getting a referral to receive the vaccine through UHS.
- Many insurance companies will require that your primary care provider (PCP) obtain a pre-authorization number – contact your PCP before coming to the clinic.
- Consolidated Health Plan (CHP), the university sponsored health insurance, will cover the cost of the vaccine at 100 percent with no preauthorization or referral required.

- Be sure to check your pharmacy benefit as the vaccine may be covered through a written prescription, which UHS will provide.

Please remember to bring your insurance card with you to the clinics.

What if my health insurance does not cover the cost of the vaccine?

No undergraduate student will be denied vaccine due to inability to pay. There will be no costs to the students associated with co-pays, deductibles, or insurance denials.

What if my insurance carrier requires a referral in order to pay for the vaccine?

[Download the attached form](#), call your primary care provider's office, obtain the authorization number, place that on the form, and bring the completed form with you to the clinic.

If a student goes to their primary care physician for either dose of their MenB vaccine, what documentation should the student provide to UHS?

Please provide UHS with a copy of the immunization record. Students can upload a copy into their medical record through the patient portal at: <https://umass.medicatconnect.com/login.aspx>