

Dear Parents:

This letter is intended as basic information only and is not to be interpreted as cause for alarm. There are no known students with this disease in the school.

Effective July 1, 2005, according to state law IC 20-30-5-18, schools must provide information on meningococcal disease and its vaccines to all students and parents. Please read the following information and keep it for future reference. There are several resource areas for you to find more information should you need it, including your family physician and the local health department. The CDC and the Indiana State Department of Health also have web sites if you have Internet access.

Meningitis is an infection in the spinal fluid or the fluid that surrounds the brain. It can be caused by one of two organisms, the first being a virus, which is usually less severe and requires no specific treatment other than symptom relief. The other is caused by a bacteria, which is much more severe and requires specific antibiotic treatment to prevent possible brain damage, hearing loss and/or learning disabilities. Diagnosis of the type (viral or bacterial) of meningitis would be necessary to know how to proceed with treatment. There are several types of bacteria that are known to cause meningitis, Haemophilus influenzae (Hib) was the most common, but because children are now routinely vaccinated against Hib the occurrence of this is reduced. Today Streptococcus pneumoniae and Neisseria meningitidis are the leading causes of bacterial meningitis.

The symptoms of meningitis are high fever, headache and stiff neck in anyone over the age of two. These symptoms can develop over several hours or they may take 1 to 2 days. Some other symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, discomfort when looking at bright lights, confusion and sleepiness. In children younger than 2, you might notice irritability, poor feeding or vomiting. As the disease progresses, any age patient can experience seizures. Early diagnosis and treatment are very important to prevent long-term damage.

Bacterial meningitis can be contagious, spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions. Casual contact is usually not enough to spread the bacteria, but prolonged close contact, such as kissing or contact with oral secretions, to a person ill with bacterial meningitis would be considered an increased risk for acquiring the infection and probable treatment with antibiotics.

There are several vaccines in use today for prevention of bacterial meningitis and depending upon the causative bacteria, there are some age restrictions to take note of. You would need to contact your health care provider for specific instruction regarding your child and the appropriate vaccine available.