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## SFDPH Update on Increase in Meningococcal Disease in Men Who Have Sex with Men in New York City

### FAQ's

New York City (NYC) health authorities have noted an increase since 2010 in invasive meningococcal disease in men who have sex with men (MSM), and have recommended vaccination for this population in NYC (details below). In San Francisco, there is no outbreak of meningococcal disease in any group. However, San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) officials are taking action in order to inform San Francisco gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men, as well as male-to-female transgender persons (transfemales), who are traveling to NYC.

#### **What is invasive meningococcal disease, or IMD?**

Invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) is a rare but serious infection caused by the bacteria *Neisseria meningitidis*. IMD can cause people to rapidly become very ill with high fevers, headache, and stiff neck (meningitis), or high fevers and a skin rash (septicemia). If you develop these symptoms, you should immediately seek medical care, by calling 911 or going to the nearest emergency room. Even if diagnosed early and treated with antibiotics, IMD can still sometimes result in death, permanent brain damage, hearing loss, or kidney failure.

#### **What are the symptoms of IMD?**

IMD may cause meningitis. The symptoms of meningitis include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck, or fevers and a skin rash. These may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and confusion. IMD can also cause bacteremia or septicemia (infection of the blood). Symptoms of bacteremia or septicemia may include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, cold hands and feet, chills, severe muscle aches or abdominal pain, rapid breathing, diarrhea, and appearance of a dark purple rash. If you develop these symptoms, you should immediately seek medical care, by calling 911 or going to the nearest emergency room.

#### **How is it transmitted?**

IMD is transmitted from person-to-person through droplets of respiratory or throat secretions. Close contact—such as kissing or contact with saliva, intimate or sexual contact, someone sneezing or coughing in your face, living or staying in a crowded space together, and sharing drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils — facilitates the spread of the disease. Droplet spread (versus airborne spread) generally takes place at a range of three feet or less. It is NOT spread by simply breathing the air where a person with the disease has been. Intimate physical encounters, including sex, may transmit infection.

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**What is the San Francisco Department of Public Health recommending?**

Gay and bisexual men and transfemales planning travel to NYC who anticipate having close or intimate contact with gay or bisexual men in NYC, should be aware of the NYC meningococcal disease outbreak and should get meningococcal vaccine. Intimate contact includes kissing or contact with saliva, intimate or sexual contact, someone sneezing or coughing in your face, living or staying in a crowded space together, and sharing drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils with someone who is infected (who may not yet show signs of disease). Gay and bisexual men and transfemales who have recently traveled to NYC and had close or intimate contact with gay and bisexual men should monitor their health closely and seek medical care immediately if they become ill with any of the symptoms noted above.

**Why did New York City report an outbreak of meningococcal disease?**

Since 2010, 22 cases of meningococcal disease have been identified among MSM in NYC, including four cases since January 2013, prompting health officials there to recommend meningococcal vaccination for:

1. HIV-infected gay and bisexual men
2. Gay and bisexual men, regardless of HIV status, who regularly have close or intimate contact with other men met either through an online website, digital application ("app"), or at a bar or party.

**Is San Francisco also seeing an outbreak or cluster of meningococcal disease?**

At this time in San Francisco, there is no outbreak of meningococcal disease in any group.

**Does having HIV put me at greater risk of getting invasive meningococcal disease?**

There is insufficient evidence that people living with HIV are at increased risk for IMD, and routine vaccination is not recommended for this group. However, in one study persons with AIDS had a higher risk of meningococcal disease. Persons living with HIV can consult with their doctor to decide if vaccination is right for them.

**How can I protect myself?**

There are several vaccines licensed for use in adults that can help protect people against invasive meningococcal disease. Meningococcal vaccine may begin to provide protection 7 to 10 days after vaccination, but not everyone will develop protective levels of antibodies. If you are HIV-infected or in other certain circumstances and you do receive the vaccine, you should return to your health care provider eight weeks later for a second dose.

**Should I get vaccinated with the meningococcal vaccine?**

If you are a gay or bisexual man or transfemale traveling to NYC and you think you will have close or intimate contact with gay or bisexual men while there, you should request meningococcal vaccination from your doctor. Intimate contact includes kissing or contact with saliva, intimate or sexual contact, someone sneezing or coughing in your face, living or staying in a crowded space together, and sharing drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils.

**Is this a live vaccine?**

The vaccines do not contain any live bacteria.

**What are the risks and side effects of the vaccine?**

Up to about half of people who get meningococcal vaccines have minimal side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot was given. These symptoms usually last for one or two days. A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever. Severe reactions, such as a serious allergic reaction, are very rare.

**How long does vaccine protection last?**

Vaccine efficacy wanes over time. Adults with ongoing increased risk of IMD are recommended to receive an additional (“booster”) dose every 5 years.

**If I was vaccinated in college, do I need to get the vaccine now?**

Some people who were vaccinated in the past may need to receive a “booster” dose. Please discuss your vaccination history with your doctor to decide if you need an additional dose of vaccine.

**Where can I find vaccine?**

First, check with your health care provider, who may have the vaccine on hand. If you don't have a regular medical provider, you can go to the Adult Immunization and Travel Clinic (AITC) at the SFDPH. For prices, directions and hours go to their website at <http://TravelClinicSF.org> or go to the Vaccines for Adults – Immunity website at <http://vaccinesforadults.org/> to find another location.

**Is this in any way related to the other meningitis outbreak that has been traced back to a steroid injection?**

The outbreak of IMD among certain gay and bisexual men in New York City is completely unrelated to the outbreak of meningitis in several states that is caused by a contaminated medication. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are currently coordinating a multistate investigation of fungal meningitis among patients who received an epidural injection with a potentially contaminated steroid medication. Please visit the CDC's website for more information: <http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/outbreaks/meningitis.html>

For additional information on meningococcal disease or this outbreak in NYC, please visit the following websites:

**San Francisco Department of Public Health:**

- Health Alerts [sfcdcp.org/healthalerts.html](http://sfcdcp.org/healthalerts.html)
- Communicable Disease Control & Prevention [sfcdcp.org/meningococcal.html](http://sfcdcp.org/meningococcal.html)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**

- Prevention and Control of Meningococcal Disease: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) (3/22/2013)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr6202a1.htm>
- Meningococcal Disease Page <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html>
- Meningococcal Vaccine Information Statement (VIS): [cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf](http://cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf)

**NYC Department of Health:**

- Press Release (3/6/13) <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pr2013/pr006-13.shtml>
- Invasive Meningococcal Disease Page  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/diseases/cdmen.shtml>
- Health Alerts Page <https://a816-health29ssl.nyc.gov/sites/NYCHAN/WebPages/home.aspx>
- Provider Information - Meningococcal Vaccine:  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/diseases/meningitis-provider.shtml>
- Patient Fact Sheet: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cd/imd-patient-factsheet.pdf>