

## **Important Parent Information on Meningococcal Disease and Vaccine**

### ***What is meningococcal disease?***

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by bacteria. It is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 – 18 years old in the United States.

### ***How do you catch the disease?***

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are very common. The disease is most common in children and people with certain medical conditions that affect their immune system. College freshman living in dormitories also have increased risk of getting the disease. The disease is spread through exchange of respiratory droplets or saliva with an infected person including kissing, coughing, sneezing, and sharing drinking glasses and eating utensils. In a few people, the bacteria overcome the body's immune system and pass through the lining of the nose and throat into the blood stream where they cause meningitis. Meningitis is a term that describes inflammation of the tissues surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

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

- Fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Red rash
- Drowsiness
- Nausea and vomiting

### ***Meningococcal vaccine: Who should get the vaccine and when?***

MCV4, or the meningococcal vaccine, is recommended for all children 11 – 12 years of age and for unvaccinated adolescents at high school entry (15 years of age). High school seniors should also consider obtaining the vaccine prior to entering college, especially if they are planning on living in a dormitory. Please consult your physician or local health department for more information.