



## Why is meningitis among MSM in the news?

There have been recent news reports of cases of bacterial meningitis among MSM in New York City and in Southern California. These cases were caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria meningitidis*, or the meningococcus. The most recent case in West Hollywood is still under investigation by the Los Angeles County Public Health Department. There is no link between the cases in NYC and LA. **The LA Public Health Department and the CDC are NOT recommending meningitis vaccine at this time.**

### FAST FACTS

1. Reports of MSM with meningitis in New York and Los Angeles have been in the news.
2. There is no evidence of increased meningitis among MSM in Seattle or Washington State.
3. Public Health and the CDC do NOT recommend mass vaccination against meningitis for all MSM at this time.

## What is meningitis?

Meningitis, an infection of the meninges (the lining that covers the brain and spinal cord), can be caused by viruses, bacteria, chemical irritation, drug allergies, fungi, parasites, and tumors. *Neisseria meningitidis* is one cause of bacterial meningitis. Meningococcal meningitis is rare, but it requires immediate medical attention.

While most people with meningitis recover, it can cause serious complications, such as **brain damage, hearing loss, or death**. People can carry meningococcal bacteria in their nose and throat and not be sick. The bacteria can be spread by very close exposure to sneezing and coughing or direct contact with nose mucus or saliva (spit) by kissing, sharing food, or sex. In addition, sharing eating utensils, a drinking glass, or a cigarette with an infected person may spread infection.

Disease symptoms may include: **fever, stiff neck, altered thinking or consciousness, rash, severe headache, low blood pressure, and generalized muscle pains**. The symptoms can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within three to seven days after exposure.

## What is the risk in Seattle?

Risk of getting invasive meningococcal disease in Seattle and Washington State is **very low**. People who have AIDS may be at somewhat greater risk, but their

risk is still low. It is not clear if the risk is increased among people with HIV infection who do not have AIDS. In King County, there has been no increase in meningococcal disease. There are no known cases among MSM. And there are no recent cases at all of the types of meningitis that have occurred in NYC and LA. Meningitis is one of many diseases reportable to public health, so that the health department can recognize and prevent outbreaks.

## Should I get vaccinated for meningitis?

Routine vaccination is **NOT** recommended for adults, but is recommended for youth aged **11-18** and others at increased risk such as college students entering dorms and military recruits. The CDC hasn't changed its vaccination recommendations for meningitis. These recommendations target people at increased risk only (see link, below). New York City has advised vaccination for MSM who have HIV and some other groups of MSM in response to the outbreak there.

**Washington State and Seattle/King County health departments are not recommending vaccination for MSM, even if they are traveling to NYC or LA.**

However, we understand that national news about this serious disease can evoke a high level of concern. We recommend that individuals considering immunization, including those living with HIV, consult their personal health care provider.

**Please see a health care provider** if you have direct contact with saliva or nose mucus from a person known to be infected with meningococcal meningitis. You should **contact your healthcare provider immediately** to receive appropriate antibiotic treatment.

## For more information see the webpages below or call your health care provider:

- CDC meningococcal disease information: [cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html](http://cdc.gov/meningococcal/index.html)
- CDC/ACIP meningococcal vaccine information: [cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/default.htm](http://cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/default.htm)
- NYC Department of Health meningococcal outbreak information and recommendations: [nyc.gov/html/doh/html/diseases/cdmen.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/diseases/cdmen.shtml)
- PHSKC health advisory: [kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/providers.aspx](http://kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/providers.aspx)