

NEW MENINGITIS VACCINE (MENACTRA™) AVAILABLE!!

The sudden death of a 17-year old Tucson star soccer player in early March was due to a bacterium called Meningococcus. His death created public awareness for this uncommon but potentially rapidly fatal disease at a time when a new vaccine has just been approved for Meningococcus.

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi, protozoa etc. Today, routine childhood immunizations have largely eliminated bacterial meningitis previously caused by two other types of bacteria. **Hib vaccine** protects against *Haemophilus influenzae* and **Prenar vaccine** protects against *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. **Meningococcus remains our biggest remaining enemy in the war against bacterial meningitis.**

About 2,600 people become ill with Meningococcus every year. Despite tremendous advances in antibiotics, intensive care and modern medicine, as many as **10-15%** of people with meningococcal meningitis will die. **The symptoms are not specific, often flu-like (headache, fever, vomiting) and easy to miss in the early stages.** The infection is **contagious** and spreads by close contact with saliva of the infected person. Children **under the age of 1 year** and young adults aged **15-24 years** are at highest risk for meningococcal meningitis. The risk of dying is significantly higher in young adults than infants.

Vaccination is an effective tool against meningococcal disease. A single dose of the new meningococcal vaccine called Menactra™ induces long lasting protection against 60% of the disease causing bacteria. Menactra™ cannot cause meningitis. The vaccine is free of preservative (mercury containing thiomersal). It has been used in the United Kingdom for 5 years already and is known to be very safe. Side effects are mild, such as pain, redness and swelling at the injection site as well as mild fatigue, and low grade fever.

Current Menactra™ vaccine recommendations are for:

- Preadolescents (11-12 year old children)
- High school entry (15 years)

- College freshmen in dormitories

Menactra™ is NOT yet recommended in infants.

The vaccine is expensive. Insurance companies vary in their coverage of this vaccine.

Please talk to us if you are interested in immunizing your teenager against bacterial meningitis. Menactra™ is **available** in our clinic.