**Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet**

**What is meningococcal disease and what causes it?**

Meningococcal disease is an infection caused by the bacteria Neisseria meningitidis. Some people carry Neisseria meningitidis in their nose and/or throat and remain healthy, without getting sick. However, sometimes Neisseria meningitidis can infect the blood or the meninges, the tissues that cover the brain and spinal cord; this causes a severe and potentially deadly illness known as Meningococcal disease.

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

Symptoms of meningococcal disease usually begin 1-10 days (usually less than 4 days, however) after a person has come in contact with the bacteria. They include meningitis, sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, vomiting, photophobia (eye sensitivity to light), and altered mental status (sleepiness, confusion). Meningitis, or inflammation of the meninges, is a symptom of the bacteria, N. Meningitidis. Thus, meningitis is not contagious but rather the bacteria is.

**How does meningococcal disease spread?**

Meningococcal disease is spread from person-to-person through droplets of nasal mucus or saliva. Close or lengthy 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, or sharing drinks, cigarettes, or eating utensils — can cause the disease to spread. People do not catch the bacteria through casual contact or by breathing air where someone with meningococcal disease has been. Typically, a person is contagious 7 days before onset of diseases until 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment.

**How is meningococcal disease treated?**

Doctors treat meningococcal disease with a number of antibiotics. It is important that treatment start as soon as possible. If a doctor suspects meningococcal disease, they will give the person antibiotics right away. Antibiotics help reduce the risk of dying. Depending on how serious the infection is, other treatments may be needed. Close contacts of a person with meningococcal disease should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick; this is called prophylaxis and doctors and the local health department recommend who should receive it.

**How can you prevent the spread of meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal vaccine is the best way to protect yourself. Additional steps to prevent the spread of disease may include:

• Avoiding close contact with others who are coughing or ill

• Washing hands often

• Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into your sleeve

• Stay at home if ill

• Seek medical attention if meningococcal-like symptoms develop