

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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## Heading to College? Be Prepared and Protected

Are you sending your child off to college this fall? Many colleges and universities across the nation require proof of meningococcal vaccination before students arrive on campus. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages families to check shot records and ensure their teens are protected against meningitis before the fall semester begins.

"Meningococcal disease progresses quickly and can have devastating consequences," said Melissa Propp, Clinic Manager at SWNPHD. "The good news is this disease can be prevented with vaccination."

In 2023, the United States had 438 confirmed and probable cases of meningococcal disease. This was the highest number since 2013. Most outbreaks in the US have happened in places where people live in close quarters, like college dorms.

Meningococcal disease is caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis* and can lead to meningitis or swelling around the brain and spine. Severe cases may also have bloodstream infections. This type of bacterial meningitis has a fatality rate of up to 15% and can cause long-term disabilities in 20% of survivors.

### Vaccination Recommendations:

The CDC recommends meningococcal vaccination starting at middle school and up to college:

- **MenACWY Vaccine:** the first dose is given at age 11 or 12, with a booster dose at age 16.
- **MenB Vaccine:** Teens and young adults aged 16 through 23 may receive this vaccine, preferably between ages 16 and 18.

These vaccines cover 5 different strains of the most common forms of meningococcal bacteria. MenACWY covers four strains, and MenB covers another strain that is most commonly seen in the US.

### Healthy People 2030 Goal:

One of the key objectives for Healthy People 2030, a national initiative from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is to increase the proportion of adolescents who receive recommended doses of the meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY) by age 17. The national

target goal is to reach 80.9% coverage rates in communities. SWNPHD and healthcare providers are working to help meet this goal.

Despite the availability of these vaccines, immunization rates continue to remain below targets. Approximately 1 in 5 U.S. teens have not received their first dose of the MenACWY vaccine, and fewer than one-third have received the recommended booster.

SWNPHD encourages all parents and guardians to talk with their healthcare providers to make sure their children are up to date on meningococcal vaccinations. Vaccines are available through local healthcare providers and are also available through SWNPHD clinics. Nebraska residents can look up their shot records in the Nebraska State Immunization Information System (NESIIS) at [nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov](https://nesiis-dhhs-prod.ne.gov).

For more information on meningococcal disease, call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube or view the website at [www.swhealth.ne.gov](http://www.swhealth.ne.gov) which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health.

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