

Vaccines - FP's Must Lead!

Back to School Vaccines

One easy-to-overlook part of parents preparing to send their children back to school is getting essential vaccinations. As the largest group of physicians providing adolescent health care ([AAFP 2013](#)), it is critically important that we family physicians ensure our patients are up to date on all vaccines with only the exceptions of medical exemptions:

- HPV vaccine remains an underutilized modality for prevention of cancer in adolescent and teen males and females.
- [Measles, varicella pertussis](#) and other vaccine preventable diseases are NOT diseases of the distant past but continue to have outbreaks to this day.
- [Hepatitis vaccines](#) are sometimes forgotten but are increasingly important as drug epidemics continue to rise

The most worrisome issue for older students is meningitis, which has been shown to spread rapidly in communal settings – for example, when college students move into dormitories, play team sports, or join fraternities and sororities. Commonly administered meningococcal vaccines cover Meningitis A, C, Y and W. However, this ignores Meningitis B which physicians and providers have the option to add coverage but typically do not because the current recommended vaccine does not cover Meningitis B.

Outbreaks of Meningitis B on college campuses across the nation in the last several years have highlighted the need for college-age young adults to be vaccinated for this potentially deadly disease. In fact, Meningitis B accounts for approximately 50% of all cases in persons 17 to 22 years of age in the US. Approximately 50 to 60 cases of Meningitis B disease occur annually in adolescents and young adults 11 through 23 years of age in the United States.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved vaccines that combat all strains of meningitis, and students should be protected against them all. However, children – including college-age ones – remain at risk because the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has neglected to recommend this essential immunization. Each year, between 1,000 and 2,600 people will contract meningitis in the United States, and as many as one in five of them will die from the disease. Among those who survive, 20 percent will suffer permanent disabilities such as brain damage, loss of kidney function, or limb amputations.

As a public health official, I have seen it cause deaths of college age young people. Please help support awareness and prevention by encouraging proper vaccinations to our patients.

Kevin Sherin MD, FAAFP
Clinical Professor of FM at FSUCOM
Local Health Officer