

Dear Parents:

The Deer Creek-Lamont School Administration wants to inform parents about a potentially deadly bacterial infection that can strike adolescents and young adults in our community called meningococcal disease, and ask for your support in generating awareness about the disease and prevention to parents in our school district.

Meningococcal disease, commonly known as meningococcal meningitis, strikes nearly 3,000 Americans each year. Adolescents and young adults have an increased rate of contracting meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases annually. Though rare, the disease comes on quickly and can cause death or permanent disability within hours. The disease is often misdiagnosed, since early symptoms can resemble the flu.

According to one study, as many as one out of every four adolescents infected with the disease may die. Of those who survive, up to 20 percent live with long-term disabilities, including brain damage, hearing loss, kidney disease and limb amputations. However, up to 83 percent of meningococcal meningitis cases occurring among adolescents and young adults may be prevented through immunization.

In May 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued recommendations calling for routine vaccination with a meningococcal conjugate vaccine for young adolescents at the preadolescent doctor's visit (age 11-12). For those who have not previously been vaccinated, CDC also recommends immunization for young adults before entering high school or at about age 15 (whichever comes first) and for college freshmen living in dormitories. Additionally, CDC states all other adolescents and college students wishing to reduce their risk may elect to be immunized.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians have released similar recommendations targeting adolescents and college students. In addition, the American College Health Association recommends all first-year college students living in residence halls be immunized against meningococcal disease.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine for use among persons aged 11-55 years, which is expected to provide long-term protection against meningococcal disease.

Deer Creek-Lamont staff has joined the National Meningitis Association (NMA) in its efforts to inform (middle/high) school students and parents in our community about this potentially deadly disease. DCLA and NMA want parents to know that this devastating illness is potentially vaccine-preventable. Immunization is the most effective means of preventing the disease, but students should also avoid sharing water bottles, lip balm or other personal items that may help transmit the disease.

We hope you agree in the importance of educating parents and students about this issue and support us in our efforts to encourage them to speak with their children's physician.

The National Meningitis Association, a national non-profit organization, was founded by parents whose adolescent and young children died or suffer permanent disabilities from meningococcal meningitis. NMA is dedicated to educating communities about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and prevention approaches to the disease. For more information about the NMA, please visit their Web site at [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).

Sincerely,