Dawn Schaefer RN BSN
West De Pere District Nurse
Parents Generally Unaware

- Adolescents and college students at increased risk
- Disease progresses rapidly and within hours can lead to permanent disability or death
- May be prevented through immunization
What Is Meningococcal Disease?

- Bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*
  - Leading cause of bacterial meningitis among U.S. toddlers, children and adolescents

- Attacks membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or poisons the blood (meningococccemia)
Overview: Meningococcal Disease

• Strikes approximately 3,000 Americans each year; 10% of them will die
  – Among teenagers and college students, fatality rate is unusually high
  – According to one study, as many as one in four teens who contract the disease may die

• Disease can progress rapidly and symptoms may resemble those of common viral illnesses:
  – High fever
  – Headache
  – Nausea
  – Exhaustion
  – Rash
Overview: Meningococcal Disease

• Nearly 20% of meningococcal disease survivors have permanent disabilities, including:
  – Brain damage
  – Loss of hearing
  – Organ failure
  – Limb amputations
Overview: Meningococcal Disease

- Meningococcal bacteria are transmitted through air droplets and/or by direct contact with secretions from infected persons (e.g., through coughing or kissing)
- The majority of meningococcal disease cases occur in winter and early spring
Overview: Meningococcal Disease

- Five serogroups, or strains of the bacteria, cause 95% of meningococcal cases worldwide
  - A, B, C, Y and W-135
  - Serogroups B, C and Y are most prevalent in the U.S.
- Among teenagers and young adults, up to 83% of cases may be prevented through immunization
A Peak of Meningococcal Disease Incidence Occurs in 15- to 19-Year-Olds*

*In California, Georgia, Maryland, Tennessee, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Oregon, 1992–1996
Disease Prevention

• Vaccination
  – Most effective method of protection
  – Immunization may prevent up to 83% of cases occurring among teenagers and college students

• Encouraging healthy habits
  – Promote frequent hand-washing and good hygiene
  – Avoid sharing items that touch a person’s mouth, since it may help spread the disease
  – Encourage teens and young adults to get enough sleep and maintain a healthy lifestyle
Immunization: Best Protection

- FDA-approved conjugate meningococcal vaccine expected to provide longer term protection against disease
  - Protects against 4 of the 5 serogroups (A,C,Y, W-135)
  - Available for use in persons 11 to 55 years
Vaccination Recommendations

• The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination for:
  – Adolescents at preadolescent doctor’s visit (11-12 years)
  – Adolescents at high school entry, or about age 15
  – College freshmen living in dormitories
  – Other groups at high risk (e.g., travellers, military recruits, complement deficient and asplenic patients)

• Other adolescents who wish to decrease their risk of meningococcal disease may choose to be immunized
What Can We Do to Protect Children in West De Pere?

• Support efforts to educate parents and students about the disease and immunization
• To reach the community with this important information, we plan to:
  – Distribute letters to parents
  – Post posters/information throughout the school
  – Conduct presentations at back-to-school/parents nights
  – Reach out to the health department to host a vaccination clinic
Supporting Immunization at West De Pere

• Talk to your family’s health care provider to see if your child should be vaccinated
• To learn more about meningococcal disease and prevention, contact Dawn Schaefer RN West De Pere District Nurse at 337-1087 ext. 8031.