



## **Policy on Immunizations**

Many diseases can threaten your student's health while they are away at college, most of which are completely preventable through immunization. Due to the close proximity of students to other students and community members, especially those students living in residence halls, they are much more susceptible to contracting common diseases. Although Gather 4 Him Christian College does not require immunizations for students, the following are *strongly* recommended:

- Measles/mumps/rubella (MMR)
- Td/Tdap
- Varicella (chickenpox)
- HPV
- Meningococcal disease
- Influenza
- Hepatitis A & B
- Meningococcal Disease

### *What is meningococcal disease?*

It is a serious illness caused by bacteria that can cause:

- Blood infections (septicemia), which causes bleeding into the skin or organs;
- Swelling of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord (meningitis)

### *Who is at risk?*

- College students have a higher risk of getting meningococcal disease because of common every day social interaction in a small space. This is especially true for students in group living arrangements.

### *How does it spread?*

- Meningococcal disease requires close contact to spread. It is spread through saliva by coughing, kissing, or sharing anything by mouth with an infected person, such as eating utensils, lip balm, or toothbrushes.

### *What are the symptoms?*

- Meningococcal meningitis and meningococcal septicemia are both very serious and can be deadly in a matter of hours.

### *Meningococcal Meningitis*

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache

- Stiff neck
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Confusion

### *Meningococcal Septicemia*

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Severe aches or pain
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhea
- Cold chills; cold hands and feet
- In the later stages, a dark purple rash on upper and lower limbs

### *What should I do if I have these symptoms?*

- Seek medical attention right away if you or another student develop symptoms of meningococcal disease. If untreated, meningococcal disease may lead to brain damage, disability, and death.

### *How is it treated?*

- Meningococcal disease is treated with antibiotics, which are most effective when given immediately after symptoms begin. Anyone who has been in contact with a person with the disease should seek treatment and receive antibiotics within 24 hours.

### *How is it prevented?*

- To prevent getting meningococcal disease, there are two different vaccinations available. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend the appropriate vaccination. Vaccinations can prevent up to 80% of meningococcal disease cases in teens and young adults.

Meningococcal ACWY vaccine is a routine recommendation for all children aged 11 to 12 years with a booster for teens aged 16 to 18 years.

Meningococcal B vaccine may be given to teens and adults aged 16 to 23 who have rare health conditions OR are at risk because of meningococcal B disease outbreak.

In addition to vaccination, it is important to engage in healthy behaviors:

- Cover your mouth when you cough
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid sharing eating and drinking utensils

### *Where can I find these vaccines?*

Your healthcare provider is the best place to receive these recommended vaccines. If your healthcare provider does not have these vaccines, ask for a referral. The vaccine may be available at community health clinics or pharmacies.

When receiving any vaccine, ask the provider to record the vaccine in the state or local registry, if available. This helps healthcare providers at future visits know what vaccines you have already received.

### **Tips for Parents – Be Prepared**

Find your student's most updated vaccination records. It is important to have them easily accessible in case your physician or your student's college requires them.

Discuss the recommended vaccinations with your physician. Vaccinations are safe and effective; however, talk to your physician about potential side effects (in case your child suffers from allergies). Your physician can also tell you more about how each vaccination will protect your student while away at school.

Ask your physician to update your student's immunization records online. Your physician can add vaccinations to the Washington State Immunization Information System. This system is available online to keep track of all immunizations you and your family have received. It makes this information easily accessible in case you need this information in the future.