**Meningococcal Disease Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the situation?**
Contra Costa Public Health is investigating a suspected case of meningococcal disease, which can cause meningitis and other life-threatening complications, of a St. Mary’s College student. While this does not qualify as an outbreak, we advise all students, faculty and staff should seek medical attention immediately if they have sudden symptoms of very high fever, severe headache and stiff neck, unusual rash or vomiting. People who have had close contact with the student are being given antibiotics.

**Who is at risk?**
People who have had close contact (e.g., roommates, kissing, sharing eating utensils or food, prolonged face-to-face contact, sharing drinks/cups, sharing cigarettes, etc.) are being given antibiotics. The St. Mary’s Student Health Center and Contra Costa Health Services are working to notify and give antibiotics to anyone who is found to be at risk from their contact with the ill student.

**How does meningococcal disease (or meningitis) spread?**
Meningococcal disease is spread from person to person. The bacteria are spread by exchanging respiratory and throat secretions during close or lengthy contact (for example, coughing, kissing, sharing cigarettes, sharing cups). Although anyone can get meningococcal disease, adolescents and college freshmen who live in dormitories are at increased risk. The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are less infectious than the viruses that cause the flu.

**What should I do now?**
Individuals should look for signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease. These symptoms include:
- High fever
- Severe headache
- Rash
- Body aches/joint pain
- Nausea/vomiting
- Increased sensitivity to light
- Confusion
- Stiff neck

Anyone with the signs or symptoms of meningococcal disease should seek medical care immediately. Early treatment of meningococcal disease is critical as the infection can quickly become life-threatening.
Is there medication available to prevent infection?
Sometimes, *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria spread to other people who have had close or lengthy contact with a patient who has meningococcal disease. People in the same household, roommates, or anyone with direct contact with patient’s oral secretions (saliva) such as a boyfriend, girlfriend, or anyone with prolonged face-to-face contact would be considered at increased risk of getting the infection. People who qualify as close contacts of a person with meningococcal disease should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting the disease. This is known as prophylaxis.

For more information, visit the Contra Costa Public Health website at http://cchealth.org/meningitis/ or call 925-313-6740.