



The Maryland State Medical Society

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COLLEGES SHOULD REQUIRE MENINGITIS B VACCINE

Op-Ed in The Baltimore Sun by Gene Ransom, MedChi CEO

BALTIMORE, September 3, 2019 — As families send their children back to school, it's important for parents to take time to review their child's vaccination records. The state of Maryland, in partnership with the school systems, does a good job making sure kindergarten through high school students are vaccinated, but parents must play an essential role in this process by discussing the issue with their child's physician to determine what vaccines are required and what are recommended.

Vaccinations do not and should not end when a child graduates from high school. A lot goes into getting a child ready to embark on his or her collegiate journey, but one important step for parents is to ensure that they are up to date on the vaccines they need, accounting for what their school requires, and what their physician may also recommend. For example, one of the recommended but not required vaccines is for meningitis B, a potentially deadly disease that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states college students are at an increased risk of contracting. Initial symptoms are often mimic the flu, but the disease can result in permanent brain damage, amputated limbs or death within days or even hours.

Meningitis B has been responsible for every major meningococcal outbreak on college campuses for nearly a decade, where it spreads quickly in close quarters like dorms, classrooms and common areas. Right now, according to the CDC, three different universities are experiencing a meningitis B outbreak. Meningitis B outbreaks have become something of a dark, annual tradition nationwide, with 10 universities across seven states experiencing outbreaks from 2013-2018.

Despite this, colleges and universities across Maryland, including those in the University System of, only require the meningitis conjugate vaccine, which protects against the A, C, W and Y strains. Despite meningitis B posing the most danger for college students, it is not required on college campuses. Vaccine requirements are critical because, even for the most health savvy, they are often the only way a parent or young person finds out about a vaccine. And, as is the case with so many dangerous diseases, vaccines are the most effective way to protect against meningitis B.

Last year, MedChi, the Maryland State Medical Society, urged the University of Maryland to change their vaccine guidance for meningitis B to reflect this, but no action has been taken. Maryland has been a leader in helping public schools ensure their student populations are vaccinated. Last year, new legislation supported by MedChi was signed into law that requires health care providers to report all vaccines administered to ImmuNet, Maryland's registry for immunizations.

This requirement has helped better understand schools and communities at risk, and MedChi has endorsed using this system to ensure the Maryland Department of Health is aware of unvaccinated kids in schools across the state. As K-12 public schools across Maryland continue

to take steps to ensure all students are protected from vaccine-preventable disease, Maryland's institutions of higher learning should follow suit.

With the fall semester around the corner, Maryland's colleges and universities should embrace this leadership role and ensure their students are protected from deadly diseases like meningitis B.

About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.

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