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Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

Indiana State Law IC 20-30-5-18 requires that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of all students about meningitis and the vaccines available to prevent one type of this serious illness at the beginning of each school year.

One type of meningitis is caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Infections caused by this bacterium are serious, and may lead to death. Symptoms of an infection with *Neisseria meningitidis* may include a high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea, confusion and a rash. This disease can become severe very quickly and often leads to deafness, mental retardation, loss of arms or legs and even death. The bacteria are spread from person to person through the exchange of nose and throat secretions, such as kissing or shared eating or drinking utensils. The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

There are several vaccines that prevent cases of this disease in teens and young adults. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requires vaccination of children with the meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Menactra and Menveo) at 11 or 12 years old, with a booster dose of the vaccine at 16 years of age. The booster dose at age 16 assures protection from the disease during a time when children are at a greater risk of infection. Children ages 9 months -10 years old who have sickle cell anemia or problems with their immune systems should also receive the vaccine.

One dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine is required for students in 6th grade and a booster dose is required for students in 11th and 12th grades. The dose for 6th grade entry is a legal requirement (Indiana Administrative Code 410 IAC 1-1-1), and it is also now required that 11th and 12th graders receive the booster dose.

All students entering 6th grade need to have a record from the child's doctor indicating the vaccine was given or a record of this immunization in the state immunization registry (CHIRP) prior to the start of the school year. Students in 11th and 12th grade should also present a record to the school once they've received their booster dose of the vaccine.

Many local health departments and private healthcare providers offer this vaccine. Please contact your health care provider for specific instructions regarding your child.

More information about meningococcal disease can be found at:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/default.htm>

IN State Department of Health website:
<http://www.in.gov/isdh/25455.htm>

Sincerely,

Gayla Vonderheide RN, BSN
Director of Health Services/School Nurse