

Important Health Topics

Strep Throat

Strep throat involves the sudden onset of a sore throat; the sore throat may be accompanied by chills, nausea, headache, fever, and swollen, painful glands in the neck. The strep infection is diagnosed by a throat culture, which can be obtained through Health Services. However, if you have a sore throat with cough, congestion, swollen glands, and no fever, this most likely *does not* represent a strep infection and thus a throat culture would not be required. Self care for strep throat includes rest, increased fluid intake, and over the counter (OTC) pain relievers. When a throat culture confirms the presence of a strep infection, a health care provider most often prescribes antibiotic treatment to shorten the duration of illness.

Influenza

Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is an infection of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. Compared with most other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, influenza often causes a more severe illness. Typical influenza illness includes fever (usually 100-103 degrees F in adults) and respiratory symptoms such as cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, plus headache, muscle aches, and extreme fatigue. Although nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea can sometimes accompany influenza, these symptoms are rarely primary. Most people who get the flu recover completely within 1-2 weeks.

Here are some strategies for protecting yourself from getting the flu:

- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home and do not attend classes if you are sick.
- Clean your hands frequently.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Consult with your health care provider about the use of antiviral medications if you do become ill with the flu.

Common Questions

Why should I get influenza vaccine?

Influenza is a serious disease. Most people are ill with influenza for only a few days, but some get much sicker and may need to be hospitalized. Influenza causes thousands of death each year; the vaccine can prevent

influenza. College students living in close quarters should particularly consider obtaining the flu shot.

When should I get the flu shot?

The best time to get the influenza vaccine is generally during October and November; an updated seasonal flu vaccine is needed each year. Health Services offers flu shots at no additional charge to all SUNY Geneseo students. Students are notified via both e-mail and our web site when the current vaccine arrives on campus and clinics have been scheduled for the vaccine to be distributed.

What about H1N1 Virus (aka "Swine Flu")?

The best measures for preventing the spread of this and any communicable respiratory disease are frequent hand washing with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizers (especially after coughing or sneezing), and avoiding close contact with sick people. Adequate rest and fluids are always essential for avoiding illness. For additional details as well as regular updates on the H1N1 virus, please visit [this page](http://www.geneseo.edu/health/h1n1) (<http://www.geneseo.edu/health/h1n1>).

Mononucleosis

Mononucleosis, or "Mono," is a generally benign, self-limited viral illness known medically as infectious mononucleosis. The illness is caused by the Epstein-Barr virus of the E-B virus (EBV), which is a member of the herpes virus family. The most common symptoms of Mono include fever, muscle aches, enlarged and tender lymph nodes, sore throat, and severe fatigue.

Common Questions

How do you get Mono?

Mono is prevalent on college campuses and occurs throughout the school year. It is spread through oral secretions, which explains why Mono is known as the "kissing disease." Studies have shown that susceptible roommates of Mono sufferers rarely acquire the disease because the EBV is an agent of low contagion. The incubation period (the time from initial contact with the virus until the sickness starts) averages from 20 to 50 days. Once an individual has had Mono, that person is thought to be permanently protected against subsequent infection with EBV.

How long does Mono last?

Most people begin to feel tired and ill 1-2 weeks before the diagnosis is made. Fever and acute illness, including swollen glands and sore throat, usually last 1-2 weeks. The fatigue may continue for 2-3 months after the

acute stage is past. Generally, once the acute stage subsides, students can gradually return to classes and other usual activities (with the exception of contact sports).

What is the treatment for Mono?

Increased rest and Tylenol to decrease the fever and muscle aches are traditional methods of treating Mono. An antibiotic may be prescribed for a sore throat, and in rare cases, steroid therapy may be used. Students are also advised to refrain from drinking alcohol during both the acute phase of the disease and a month subsequent to this to minimize liver inflammation.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). There are 300,000 new Hepatitis B infections each year in the U.S. Of these new infections, 90% occur in young adults. The virus attacks the liver and can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, liver failure, liver cancer, and even death. There is no cure for Hepatitis B infection; however, there is a vaccine available that is effective in preventing infection with the Hepatitis B virus. The American College Health Association highly recommends vaccination against Hepatitis B, especially for college students living on campus. Also of concern is Hepatitis C, which is becoming even more prevalent than Hepatitis B.

Common Questions

How does a person become infected with hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is transmitted through blood or body fluids, such as saliva, semen, and vaginal secretions, of a person who is infected with the virus. A person can acquire hepatitis B by having unprotected sex with a person who is infected with the virus, by having a job that exposes him/her to infected blood, or via activities such as having body parts pierced, obtaining tattoos, and sharing needles for injecting drugs. However, you should also know that 30 to 40% of people with hepatitis B have no identifiable risk factor for the disease and that the Hepatitis B virus is much more contagious than HIV.

What is a Hepatitis B carrier?

Some people, known as carriers, who are infected with Hepatitis B never fully recover and carry the virus in their blood for the rest of their lives. Many Hepatitis B carriers look and feel well. They may not know they are infected, and can pass the virus to others throughout their lives without knowing it. Carriers of Hepatitis B are also at risk for chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.

What can you do?

You can decide to be vaccinated. The Hepatitis B vaccine is available at Health Services.

Meningitis

Meningitis is an infection of the bloodstream and meninges (meninges is the lining covering the brain and spinal cord). This condition may be caused by either a virus or bacteria. Viral meningitis is usually self-limiting and does not cause serious illness; bacterial meningitis may lead to more severe illness, depending on the causative organism. While the organisms that cause meningitis are relatively common, severe illness is not. The infection is passed by droplet transmission like a cold, but may progress into a more serious illness in a few individuals. For more information on the on both viral and bacterial meningitis, view this [Meningitis: Questions and Answers](http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/faq.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/about/faq.html>) page from the CDC.

Common Questions

What are the symptoms of Meningitis?

Viral Meningitis is the more common form of the illness, and it is usually much less severe. Symptoms include fever, headache, and other cold-like symptoms. The illness will usually last less than 10 days. Bacterial Meningitis develops quickly, with a rapid onset of symptoms. Fever, stiff neck, nausea and/or vomiting, and severe headache are the most common symptoms of Bacterial Meningitis. If the infection is left untreated, drowsiness will occur, followed by unconsciousness. Untreated Bacterial Meningitis can be fatal.

Are college students at risk?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that the lifestyle of college students as well as the close quarters in which they live may put them at an increased risk. However, students who get enough rest, drink plenty of fluids, eat an adequate diet, wash their hands frequently, and avoid alcohol may lower their risk of contracting the disease.

There *is* something else you can do which could possibly reduce your vulnerability to meningitis. Currently there exist multiple strains (serotypes) of the meningococcal bacteria (*Neisseria meningitidis*). A new vaccine called Menactra is now available to potentially prevent infection with the serotypes A, C, Y and W135. These serotypes are collectively responsible for 80% or more of meningococcal disease in the United States; of those who receive vaccination, up to 85% safely build tolerance to the bacteria. The American College Health Association and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) highly

recommends vaccination against bacterial meningitis, especially for college students living on campus; this immunization is now being recommended for all children starting at age 11-12.

What is the treatment?

Certain antibiotics are very effective in treating this illness. In addition, individuals who have been in close personal contact with a meningitis patient (such as a roommate or partner) are considered for preventative treatment with an antibiotic. Casual contact, as might occur in a classroom or a residence hall, is not usually enough to cause concern. In addition, evidence is mounting that the meningitis vaccine is effective in preventing campus outbreaks, and college students who receive the vaccine may reduce the risk of contracting the meningococcal disease.

We would like to suggest that you discuss this information with your primary care clinician so that you can make an informed choice about the benefits and the disadvantages of vaccination.

Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that develops in the pigment cells present in the skin. It can be more serious than the other forms of skin cancer because it may spread to other parts of the body (metastasize) and cause serious illness and death. About 50,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed in the United States every year. Unfortunately, many of these new cases are [young adults](https://www.youtube.com/user/DCMFCanada) (<https://www.youtube.com/user/DCMFCanada>).

How can you protect yourself?

The alarming increases of malignant melanoma in young adults has recently prompted a number of recommendations:

1. **NO TANNING:** Studies have shown that the use of tanning beds quadruples the risk of melanoma. "Spray-on" tanning agents are safe but require the use of sun block as they are not protective.
2. **DAILY USE OF SUNBLOCK:** Use of sun-blocking agents with at least an SPF of 15 (be sure to choose one which blocks both UVA and UVB rays) is recommended on areas of skin routinely exposed to the sun. -->On days of known or expected prolonged sun exposure, sun screen should be applied to the exposed skin, and reapplied every 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and after each time in the water.
3. **PROTECTIVE CLOTHING/SUNGLASSES:** Be sure that your clothing is somewhat protective and wear sunglasses in order to protect your eyes from harmful UV rays.

4. **PERFORM SKIN SELF-EXAMS:** Take the time to examine your skin at least every few months. Look for new lesions (spots) or any changes (for example, growth in size, changes in color, or irregular borders) in existing skin lesions/moles. The "ugly ducking spot" or the skin lesion that particularly "stands out" (i.e., looks different from the others) is more likely to be suspicious. Other warning signs include skin lesions that itch or bleed spontaneously. See your dermatologist or primary care physician promptly if you notice any of the changes described above.

Pink eye

Pink eye (conjunctivitis) is an inflammation of the tissue on the surface of the eye and/or the inside lining of the eyelids. The more common causes of pink eye include:

- Infection (viruses, bacteria)
- Inflammatory causes such as chemicals, fumes, dust, and debris
- Allergies
- Injuries
- Oral genital contact with someone who might be infected with a sexually transmitted disease (STD) such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or herpes

Signs and Symptoms

The eye is usually pink to red with an irritated appearance. There may or may not be a discharge (tears, mucus, or pus), and there may be sensitivity to bright light. There may be burning, itching, a sandy or gravelly feeling, and even pain. The lids may be stuck together in the morning upon waking. Vision might be blurred by the mucous or excess tears in the eye(s). Pink eye typically affects both eyes.

Self-Care Guidelines

- Wash hands frequently so as not to contaminate others or reinfect yourself.
- Separate your towels and washcloths so that others will not be at risk.
- If itching is the most irritating feature, apply cold compresses.
- If swelling is bothersome, apply cold compresses.
- If there is a lot of discharge, especially if mucous-like, use warm compresses.
- If there is aching and/or pain, use warm compresses.
- Wash the eyelids very gently and soak off debris; do not pick at it.

- Never rub the eyes, as this can spread the problem.
- Do not share contact lens paraphernalia with an affected person.

Most over-the-counter medications will soothe the eye, but, since most pink eye is viral and will go away on its own within 7–10 days, no other medications are usually needed.

When to Seek Medical Care

- Pain is increasing.
- Vision is worsening.
- Swelling is increasing.
- There is blistering and/or rash on the eyelids.
- There is a lot of thick mucus secreting.
- The condition is not getting better within a week.

Note: Thick, pus-laden discharge may be from a possible blinding form of pink eye and requires urgent medical care.

Additional Information

If you have further questions about the above diseases and vaccines, please contact the Health Services at 701-845-7212. Also, if you would like more information about specific diseases, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov/diseases) (<http://www.cdc.gov/diseases>) site. If you are looking for information on more common health problems, go to our [Common Health Concerns](http://www.geneseo.edu/health/common_health_concerns) (http://www.geneseo.edu/health/common_health_concerns) page.