

OFF TO COLLEGE?

Starting college means exposures to new friends, new classes, and even new germs! Communal living spaces, crowded social events, and irregular sleeping habits can all leave college students vulnerable to illness. To protect yourself from vaccine-preventable diseases, make sure you are up to date on all recommended vaccines listed below. Some may be required for enrollment—check with your school to confirm. Don't forget to keep up with seasonal vaccines like flu and COVID-19 every year, too!



College Immunization Checklist:

- Hepatitis B
- HPV (human papillomavirus)
- MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)
- Meningococcal
- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis)
- Varicella (chickenpox)

What do I need to know about meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal (me-nin-je-kok-ul) disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria that can infect the blood or areas around the brain and spinal cord. Infection can lead to brain damage, disability, amputation of limbs, and rapid death.

College freshmen in dorms are at higher risk of catching meningococcal disease. The bacteria are spread person-to-person through air droplets. Close contact such as kissing, coughing, living in close quarters, and even sharing things like cups, lip balm, or vape pens can increase your risk of getting the disease.

Meningitis is the most common form of meningococcal disease. Common symptoms of meningitis include stiff neck, headache, high fever, sensitivity to light, and confusion. Contact a healthcare provider right away and do not delay in seeking treatment if you have these symptoms.

Check with your health care provider about which meningococcal vaccines you need.

What should I know about the other vaccines?

Hepatitis B vaccine is a three-dose series that protects against hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis B virus, which lives in an infected person's body fluids, can be spread through sexual contact or sharing needles like those used for tattoos, body piercings, or injectable drugs. The virus can cause life-long infection that damages one's liver.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is a two- or three-dose series, depending on what age you are when you start the series. (Two doses if you start before age 15. Three doses if you start after 15.) It prevents genital warts and several cancers of the reproductive system, as well as throat and mouth cancer. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection, with older adolescents and young adults at highest risk of getting infected.

Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is a two-dose series that protects against all three of these highly contagious diseases that spread by inhaling infected respiratory droplets from someone talking, coughing, or sneezing nearby, or touching contaminated surfaces. The diseases can have serious consequences like brain swelling and deafness. Overall, 5–10% of the U.S. population has the meningococcal bacteria in their throat, but only a few of them get sick. No one knows why some people get sick and others don't.

Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is recommended once every 10 years (after the primary series) and protects against these three bacterial diseases. College students are at risk of contracting pertussis, or whooping cough. Those sick with pertussis can cough so hard they vomit, gasp for air, or even break a rib. The cough can last for months.

Varicella, or chickenpox, vaccine is a two-dose series. Though you may think of chickenpox as just an itchy rash, it can cause pneumonia or serious skin infections. This is especially true in young adults who are more likely to have severe symptoms and complications from chickenpox.

Where can I find more information?

Ask your healthcare provider or student health services about getting vaccinated.

[California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch](https://shotsforschool.org)
(shotsforschool.org for California Colleges and Universities)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://cdc.gov/vaccines) (cdc.gov/vaccines)

[American College Health Association](https://acha.org) (acha.org)

