For Immediate Release

World Meningitis Day is April 24; learn how to prevent and treat illness

MORGANTOWN, WV (April 20, 2018) — Just in the past week or so alone, since April 10, 2018, five colleges in Massachusetts as well as Oregon State University are experiencing meningitis outbreaks caused by serogroup B meningococcal disease, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov).

The outbreaks have occurred just two weeks before World Meningitis Day, which is Tuesday, April 24.

Groups with depleted immune systems such as the elderly and babies are at increased risk for contracting meningitis. Because colleges have many students living in close quarters in dormitories and athletes working out and using locker rooms together, those groups also can be prone to meningitis outbreaks.

In the United States, 4,100 cases of bacterial meningitis were reported each year from 2003 to 2007. Of those reported cases, 500 people died from the illness.

Meningitis is a serious infection that causes membranes covering the brain and spinal cord to swell. It is often caused by a bacterial or viral infection of fluid surrounding those areas. However, injuries, cancer and certain drugs can also cause meningitis, according to CDC.

Monongalia County Health Department’s Clinical Services program can help in the fight against meningitis. There are two vaccines available to protect against the illness. Preteens and teens should receive the meningococcal conjugate vaccine, which is a required vaccination for seventh and 12th graders. Older teens, ages 16 to 18, can also receive the serogroup B meningococcal vaccine. Both are available at MCHD.
Meningitis can be caused by several types of bacteria, including *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, Group B *Streptococcus*, *Neisseria meningitidis*, *Haemophilus influenzae* and *Listeria monocytogenes*. The likelihood of contracting bacterial meningitis differs depending on age, community setting, medical conditions and work conditions.

Viral meningitis is the most common of the six different types: bacterial, viral, fungal, amebic, parasitic and non-infectious. Viral meningitis isn’t as severe as bacterial meningitis, which can lead to brain damage, hearing loss and learning disabilities. Getting tested is the only way to be certain what type someone has.

A doctor will run different lab tests to determine which form of meningitis a person has contracted. One can expect to have samples taken from the nose, throat, rectum, blood and spinal fluid. The tests will determine what specifically is causing the infection, which in turn will help with treatment.

Each form of meningitis is treated differently. Antibiotics won’t help if the infection is viral and usually the infection will go away within seven to 10 days. Antiviral medication would only be helpful if the patient contracted meningitis from the herpes virus or influenza. Bacterial meningitis can be treated with antibiotics and it is important to start treatment as soon as possible.

*Neisseria meningitidis*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and Hib are all bacteria that can cause meningitis that can be prevented with a vaccine. Pregnant woman can protect their babies by talking to their doctors about getting tested for group B strep and avoiding certain foods that may be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Other ways to protect against meningitis are by maintaining healthy habits such as not smoking, getting plenty of rest and avoiding people who are sick.

To learn more about meningitis, visit [cdc.gov/meningitis](http://cdc.gov/meningitis). To make an appointment to get vaccinated at MCHD’s Clinical Services program, call 304-598-5119.