

Dear Parents,

A child attending the West Chatham YMCA summer camp in Pooler was recently diagnosed with bacterial meningitis. The child is at an area hospital and is responding to treatment. You are receiving this letter because your child may be at risk of developing the illness, and we want to work with you to protect your child. The Chatham County Health Department is recommending he/she receive 4 doses of an antibiotic that can prevent infection. It is important for your child to receive this antibiotic immediately and take all doses as prescribed.

Bacterial meningitis is a serious infection of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. The bacteria that cause meningitis are normally spread through respiratory and throat secretions among people who have had close or prolonged contact with a patient with meningitis. People in the same household, or anyone with direct contact with a patient's oral secretions – coughing or kissing – would be considered at increased risk of acquiring infection. However, none of the bacteria that cause meningitis are as contagious as things like the common cold or flu and are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

The West Chatham YMCA in Pooler is working closely with the Chatham County Health Department by identifying the children who need preventive treatment, and allowing us to begin giving that treatment today on campus. Some of the children who attended the camp are from Effingham County and began school this week, so the Effingham County Health Department will also be working with school nurses to ensure those children from the camp are treated and parents are notified. At this time, the Health Department does not feel it is necessary to provide treatment to anyone other than close contacts who attended the summer camp, and family members of the ill individual.

You should be aware of the symptoms of meningitis, and tell your doctor immediately if your child has any of the following symptoms: fever, headache, stiff neck, and a rash. Other symptoms such as confusion, sleepiness, lethargy, or discomfort looking into bright lights are also common in some patients.

For more information about bacterial meningitis, go to www.gachd.org or call your doctor or the Chatham County Health Department at 652-5200.

Respectfully,

Diane Z. Weems, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Chatham County Health Department/Coastal Health District