What is Meningococcal Disease?
Meningococcal disease is a rare but life-threatening illness, caused by the bacterium Neisseria meningitidis. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis (an infection of the brain and spinal cord coverings) in the United States. The most severe form of the disease is meningococcemia, an infection of the bloodstream by this bacterium.
Deaths from meningococcal disease have occurred among Maryland college students in recent years. Students living in dormitories or residence halls are at increased risk. The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene encourages meningococcal vaccination of higher education students.
About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the United States. Ten to 15 percent of these people die in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, 10 percent lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

About the Vaccine
Meningococcal vaccine can be effective in preventing four types of meningococcal disease. The vaccine is not effective in preventing all types of the disease, but it does help to protect many people who might become sick if they don’t get the vaccine. Drugs such as penicillin can be used to treat meningococcal infection. Still, about one out of every 10 people who get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life.
A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as a severe allergic reaction. People should not get meningococcal vaccine if they have ever had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of meningococcal vaccine. Some people who get meningococcal vaccine have mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot was given (which is usually under the skin of the upper arm). A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever.