College Students Must be Aware of the Risk Posed by Meningitis

A high fever, severe headache, stiff neck and sleepiness are all symptoms of the potentially fatal disease known as meningitis, according to the Mayo Clinic. As those who live in community settings are susceptible to being infected, college students should be aware of meningitis to best protect themselves from the illness.

What Students Need to Know

When individuals develop meningitis, the membranes that surround their brain and spinal cord become inflamed. The Mayo Clinic states that the disease can require immediate antibiotic treatment, and in other cases, the infection simply improves on its own. Still, those who believe they have developed the condition are advised to seek medical attention.

The alternative is the development of an array of possible complications, including permanent brain damage, seizures, kidney failure, hearing loss and even death.

College students who live on campus are at a higher risk of becoming infected as they are often found in packed lecture halls, small dorm rooms and athletic events, among other places where large groups come together. As a result, it's easier for bacterium to spread through what the Mayo Clinic refers to as "the respiratory route."

The Statistics

Students should never assume they are immune to the disease. Of those who develop meningitis, about 20% are between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age, according to the National Meningitis Association.

On an annual basis, the NMA states that between 800 and 1,200 people develop the disease. A total of 10% to 15% of these cases result in death.

Learning From the Past

Schools such as Princeton University and the University of California at Santa Barbara have had to deal with meningitis cases, reports the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at
the University of Minnesota. Of course, it's those who have lost loved ones to the disease that understand just how deadly it can be.

Gail Bailey is among those who understand this feeling, as she lost her son Eddy, a University of Wisconsin-Madison student, to meningitis in 2002, according to the Journal Sentinel. The 20-year-old degree seeker thought he had the flu, and then died 16 hours later.

Losing her child to meningitis is "one of the worst things that can happen to anyone," Bailey told the Journal Sentinel.

Eddy was unaware that a vaccine against meningitis existed and, as a result, never received it, the Journal Sentinel reports. To prevent tragedies of this nature, many institutions require students to receive this vaccination. Ohio University is one school that began asking degree seekers receive the vaccination in 2010, according to the school's website.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all first-year college students get vaccinated. Even if bachelor's degree seekers received a vaccination before they turned 16, the CDC advises them to get a booster to up their defense against the disease. This simple action could make all the difference.

Missouri Takes Action

Beginning July 1, 2015, students enrolled at public colleges and universities in Missouri will be required to receive the meningitis vaccination if they reside in on-campus housing, reports the Columbia Daily Tribune. This is action is required under a bill that Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon recently signed into law. Only students who have medical or religious exemptions can attend school without being vaccinated.

"I'm hoping that by having the statute in place that private institutions will follow suit," Kristin Sohl, medical director at the University of Missouri Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, told the Tribune.
Missouri A+ scholarship program to be expanded

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The Missouri Department of Higher Education is planning to expand a state scholarship program to some students who entered the United States without legal permission before they were 16 years old, the department's attorney said.

The plan is to open the A+ program, which provides two free years of tuition at Missouri community colleges, to students who have applied with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" status, The Columbia Daily Tribune reported (http://bit.ly/1mhlujv ).

That status allows eligibility for work but also makes the population eligible for education benefits because the students would be deemed "lawfully present" in this country, education department attorney Bill Thornton said. He said no timeline has been established for the change.

Under Missouri law, people who are not lawfully in the U.S. are excluded from post-secondary benefits. The federal government created the new "lawfully present" category in 2012.

"But because this newly created group is lawfully present, if they can provide proper documentation, they can be part of this program," Thornton said. "That's how we interpreted it."

The Missouri Legislature last session passed a bill prohibiting students with "lawfully present" status from receiving in-state tuition. However, students in the A+ program don't pay tuition, so that law doesn't apply to them.
Lawfully present status requires applicants to have come to this country before age 16; to be 30 or younger as of June 15, 2012; to have continuously lived in the U.S. since June 15, 2007; to be enrolled in school or have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, a general education development certificate; or be honorably discharged from the Coast Guard or armed forces. The status also requires applicants to have not been convicted of a felony, "significant misdemeanor" or three or more misdemeanors.

Homeland Security has received just over 2,805 applications for the status in Missouri and has approved 2,448, the newspaper reported.

"Our role is to take the statutes and have rules that are based on those statutes," Thornton said. "We are finishing tightening our regulations to make sure they're in line."

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**Clery Fines: Proposed vs. Actual**

July 17, 2014

By Michael Stratford

**NO MU MENTION**

WASHINGTON -- Since the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 formed a specialized unit to enforce the federal campus safety law known as the Clery Act, an increasing number of colleges have faced fines for violating it.

Department officials over the past four years have finalized the penalties against 15 institutions, compared with the six total fines doled out during the previous decade. Many more cases are currently making their way through the process, and the department plans to double, over the next few years, the number of regulators dedicated to Clery Act enforcement.

In spite of that increased scrutiny, colleges facing penalties have continued to be successful in getting their Clery Act fines reduced, according to data provided by
the Education Department.

Far more often than not, colleges are able to either persuade officials to lower the fines or enter into a settlement through which they pay a lower amount than the department had originally proposed. Of the 21 Clery Act fines that have actually been imposed on colleges since 2000, 17 have been lower than the department initially proposed, the agency’s data show.

Among those institutions successful in winning a discount on their fines, the average reduction was more than 25 percent and usually represented tens of thousands of dollars. The largest discount, proportionally speaking, was a $110,000 fine that the department proposed against Pittsburgh Technical Institute in 2005; the for-profit institution based in Oakdale, Pa., was ultimately fined half that amount, $55,000, in 2007.

Violations for which a college may be penalized under the Clery Act include inaccurately reporting crimes that occur on campus, not having sufficient procedures in place to handle sexual assault, and not providing timely warning to the campuses community of an ongoing threat to public safety.

The fine amount originally proposed by the department has become the actual fine imposed on an institution in only four Clery Act cases so far -- at Miami University of Ohio in 2005; Washington State University in 2001; the University of Northern Iowa in 2013; and the University of North Dakota, also in 2013.

The Clery Act, first enacted in 1990, requires colleges to report crimes that happen on or near their campuses and to warn students and employees about ongoing threats to public safety.

Congress last year expanded the law to include new categories of crimes that must be reported and to mandate training and prevention programs. The Education Department is in the process of finalizing rules to carry out those changes.

The Education Department previously delegated enforcement of campus safety rules to its eight regional offices. But in 2010, the department formed a special compliance unit in the Office of Federal Student Aid and dedicated six full-time
regulators to the task. The team now employs 13 full-time Clery Act specialists, and the agency’s staffing plans call for 26 by the 2016 fiscal year, officials said.

Clery Act fines follow the same process as any other penalty that the department may impose on colleges participating in federal student aid programs, Federal Student Aid officials said. Colleges have an opportunity to appeal both formally and informally to the department, in addition to making their case to an administrative judge, before the education secretary makes a final decision.

But in many cases that process can be lengthy and span multiple years. One high-profile case of Clery Act fine reduction played out over the last seven years at Virginia Tech. In the wake of the April 16, 2007, massacre on that campus that left 32 people dead, the Education Department found that university officials had violated the Clery Act by being too slow to inform the campus community that a gunman was on the loose. Virginia Tech vigorously objected to the department’s finding and its proposed $55,000 fine; the university ultimately settled with the department and paid $32,500 earlier this year.

Olabisi L. Okubadejo, a lawyer at Ballard Spahr LLP who has represented colleges fighting proposed Clery Act fines, said that most colleges appeal the decision “as any reasonable person would if someone were trying to fine them tens of thousands of dollars.”

Institutions often make the case to the department that the behavior or policies that the department was seeking to change with the fine have already been changed, she said.

In other cases, she said, colleges have successfully argued the technicalities or merits of the violation.

“Sometimes it’s as simple as saying, 'You’re misreading our map here, and that incident didn’t occur on campus property,' ” she said.

S. Daniel Carter, a prominent campus safety advocate, said that he was not too concerned about the reduction in Clery Act fines. He likened the department’s negotiations with colleges to plea bargaining in the criminal justice system, and
noted that it’s often in both sides’ interest to settle for a lower fine instead of drawing out a lengthy process even further.

“The current fine structure is resulting in institutions being held accountable and taking corrective action,” said Carter, who directs the 32 National Campus Safety Initiative at the VTV Family Outreach Foundation. “The larger challenge is always the odds of an institutions being held accountable rather than the amount of the penalty they are held accountable.”

Carter said a more pressing issue was to increase the transparency in how the department investigates colleges for Clery Act violations, such as disclosing the list of institutions under investigation for possible violations like the department now does for sexual assault investigations under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which governs gender bias.
Still, others have said that the current fine structure and process need to be changed.

For instance, the Clery Act data provided to Inside Higher Ed by the department were originally compiled to respond to an information request by Senator Claire McCaskill, the Missouri Democrat who has said she’d like to see changes in the structure of penalties for colleges violating campus safety and antidiscrimination laws.

McCaskill, who is drafting legislation aimed at reducing campus sexual assaults, has said she’s eyeing stiffer penalties on colleges that mishandle those cases under the Clery Act and Title IX. That bill is expected to be released after Congress returns from its August recess.