Dear Parent or Guardian:

As a parent there is nothing more important than safeguarding your child's health. The Washington State Legislature requires us to make information available to you about and human papillomavirus (HPV) and meningococcal disease. Know the facts about these diseases and the vaccines available to protect your child.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Prevention

What is HPV?

HPV is a very common virus that can cause cancers later in life. Nearly 42 million people are currently infected with HPV in the United States. About 13 million people, including teens, become infected with HPV each year. In the U.S., an estimated 36,000 people are affected by a cancer caused by HPV infection each year. While there is screening for cervical cancer that can detect cancer early, there is no recommended screening for the other cancers caused by HPV infection, like cancers of the back of the throat, anus, penis, vagina, or vulva.

How can I protect my child from HPV?

HPV vaccination provides safe, effective, and lasting protection against the HPV infections that most commonly cause cancer. HPV vaccination works extremely well. HPV vaccine has the potential to prevent more than 90% of HPV-attributable cancers. Since HPV vaccination was first recommended in 2006, infections with HPV types that cause most HPV cancers and genital warts have dropped 88% among teen girls and 81% among young adult women.

Who should get the vaccine and when should they get it?

Because the vaccine is more effective when given at younger ages, two doses of HPV vaccine are recommended for all children starting at ages 9 to 14. If children do not get the first dose of HPV vaccine before age 15, they will need three doses.

For more information on HPV, the vaccine, and cervical cancer:

- Washington State Department of Health: https://doh.wa.gov/hpv
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/hpv

Meningococcal Disease and Prevention

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness. It spreads through close contact by coughing, kissing, or sharing anything by mouth, such as water bottles, eating utensils, lip balm, or toothbrushes. It can cause pneumonia, blood infections, and swelling of the covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Severe disease can cause brain damage, loss of hearing or limbs, and death. Fortunately, this life-threatening infection is rare – we usually have only about 20 to 30 reported cases each year in Washington. Adolescents and young adults are more likely to get meningococcal disease, especially if they live in group settings like college dorms.

How can I protect my child from meningococcal disease?

The meningococcal conjugate vaccine, or MCV4, prevents against four types of the disease. It is a 2-dose series recommended for all children between 11 and 12 years of age, and again at 16 to 18 years of age. The meningococcal B vaccine, or MenB, is recommended during a meningococcal B disease outbreak or based on shared decision making with your health care provider.

For more information about meningococcal disease and how to prevent it:

- DOH information: https://doh.wa.gov/you-and-your-family/illness-and-disease-z/meningitis-meningococcal-disease
- CDC information: https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/mening.html

Where can I find the meningococcal and HPV vaccines?

Talk to your health care provider about the vaccines your child needs. In addition to meningococcal and HPV vaccines, your preteen should receive Tdap. Washington offers vaccines at no cost to kids through age 18 through the Childhood Vaccine Program. Participating providers may charge an office visit fee or administration fee to give the vaccine. If you can't afford these fees, you can ask to have them waived. This provider map can be used to find providers in the Childhood Vaccine Program: https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/vaccinemap/

Sincerely,
Tracy Gonser
Executive Assistant to the Head of School