Starting January 1, 2012, all students entering a Texas institute of higher education that are under the age of 30, must be vaccinated for bacterial meningitis.

**For youth 18 years old and younger:**

There is no reason a youth cannot get the vaccination well before they turn 18. To meet the requirements of the Texas law, which can be found [here](#), the student must have received the vaccination or booster within the past 5 years. So making sure foster youth get the vaccine well before they turn 18 as it is critical to avoiding problems including obtaining payment for the vaccination or lapsed insurance coverage. This should be as much of a part of college planning as taking the ACT or filling out financial aid forms.

**For youth 19 years old and older:**

The bacterial meningitis vaccine is covered by Medicaid if you are 19 years old or older.

If you have not received your meningitis shot and you are either in DFPS conservatorship, you have Medicaid for Transitioning Foster Care Youth (MTFCY) or you are in the Former Foster Care Youth in Higher Education (FFCHE) program, you should call Star Health at 1-800-218-7453. Ask to speak to a Service Coordinator in the Foster Care Department. Once they have verified that you have not already received the vaccine, they will find a provider so that you can get the bacterial meningitis vaccine you are required to get for school. If they find that you already received the vaccination, they can direct you at how to get a copy of the record.

If you are enrolled in the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program and are not eligible for STAR Health, Traditional Medicaid, MTFCY, or FFCHE medical coverages, you may use part of your ETV living expense stipends if allowed by the university’s cost of attendance policy for health insurance, doctor co-payment, prescriptions, or other health expenses. The ETV funds cannot be used to directly pay for a doctor visit. Talk to your PAL caseworker for additional information.

**Meningitis Vaccination Exception:**

There is an exception to the meningitis vaccination requirement that allows for a student to not have to obtain a vaccination.
Texas Administrative Code Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 21, Subchapter T  Rule §21.614 (b) A student, or a parent or guardian of a student, is not required to submit evidence of receiving the vaccination against bacterial meningitis if the student, or a parent or guardian of a student, submits to the institution:

(1) an affidavit or a certificate signed by a physician who is duly registered and licensed to practice medicine in the United States, in which it is stated that, in the physician's opinion, the vaccination required would be injurious to the health and well-being of the student; or

(2) an affidavit signed by the student stating that the student declines the vaccination for bacterial meningitis for reasons of conscience, including a religious belief. (The law governing the vaccination can be found http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.51.htm and further rules regarding can be found here.

We do not recommend that students execute an affidavit declining the vaccination for reasons of conscience merely to avoid the vaccination requirement. The vaccination is directed at protecting young adults from a deadly and devastating illness that they are at increased risk of contracting in the communal college setting. However, should the young adult want to claim this exemption, they need to request the affidavit exemption form from the Texas Department of State Health Services at this site: https://webds.dshs.state.tx.us/immco/. It is our understanding that colleges will not accept any affidavit except the official state form for a student who will be living on campus or for a student who is under 18 years old. Because of the process involved in obtaining the affidavit form, this will probably not serve as a quick fix for a youth with an impending deadline. Students who are over 18 and not living on campus can submit the Affidavit of Exemption from Immunizations for Bacterial Meningitis for Reasons of Conscience form that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has developed.

If a student has an exception and is not vaccinated, they must understand that they could be kept off campus during a disaster or public health emergency, terrorist attack, hostile military or paramilitary action, or extraordinary law enforcement emergency declared by an appropriate official or authority from the Texas Department of State Health Services. A public health emergency might be declared if one or two students get meningitis as health officials take meningitis very seriously.

Links:
- Bacterial Meningitis Shot for Students Entering Higher Education Legal Memorandum
- DFPS link on Bacterial Meningitis Vaccine for Students Entering Post-Secondary Education