NSW Health

Meningococcal ACWY vaccination

Parent Information Sheet

The Australian Government makes some vaccines free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

Q. What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious infection. It usually causes meningitis (inflammation of the brain and spinal cord) and/or sepsis.

Symptoms may include:

- sudden fever
- headache
- stiff neck
- joint pain
- red-purple rash or bruises
- sensitivity to bright lights
- nausea and vomiting

Up to 10% of meningococcal infections can be fatal, even with appropriate antibiotic treatment. Survivors may be left with long-term complications.

Q. How is meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal bacteria are passed between people in the saliva from the nose and throat. This generally requires close and long contact with a person carrying the bacteria who is usually completely well. An example of 'close and long contact' is living in the same household or deep kissing. Meningococcal bacteria do not spread easily and do not live long outside the body.

Q. How do vaccines work?

Vaccines help your immune system fight infections. If a vaccinated person gets exposed to these infections, their immune system can fight it better, either preventing the disease developing or making it less severe.

Q. How effective is the meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

One dose of the meningococcal ACWY vaccine is very effective against four types of meningococcal disease (types A, C, W and Y). It does not protect against type B disease.

Q. Who should get this vaccine?

All Year 10 students in secondary schools and/or those aged 15-19 should get this vaccine to protect against meningococcal types A, C, W, and Y.

Q. Who should not get this vaccine?

Meningococcal ACWY vaccine should not be given to people who:

- are or may be pregnant
- have had anaphylaxis following a previous dose of meningococcal vaccine
- have had anaphylaxis following any of the vaccine additives
- have known hypersensitivity to tetanus toxoid.

Q. What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can cause unconsciousness or death if not treated quickly. It is very rare after vaccines. Immunisation providers are trained to treat anaphylaxis.

Q. How safe are vaccines?

Vaccines in Australia are very safe. They must pass strict safety checks before the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approves them. The TGA also monitors vaccines after they are used.

Q. What is in the meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

The vaccine may contain trometamol, sucrose, sodium chloride, sodium acetate, and water. These ingredients are added in tiny amounts to help the vaccine work or preserve it.

Q. Hasn't my child already received the meningococcal ACWY vaccine? Is it safe to get it again?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine has been offered to children aged 12 months since July 2018. Your child may have had a meningococcal C vaccine before. That vaccine only protects against meningococcal C disease.

In some countries, a booster shot for adolescents is recommended. This ACWY vaccine provides protection against meningococcal C, as well as A, W, and Y.

Some adolescents with certain health conditions (such as no spleen or immune deficiency) might have already had this vaccine. If so, please check with your GP or specialist to see if your child needs another dose.

Q. Who else should get this vaccine?

This vaccine is recommended for:

- people traveling to areas with a high risk of meningococcal disease, such as the Hajj
- certain workers, like microbiology lab staff
- people with medical conditions, such as those without a spleen.

Q. What are the side effects of the meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

Side effects are usually mild. They may include:

- fever
- headache
- dizziness
- pain, redness, or swelling where the shot was given.

These side effects typically go away within 2–3 days. Serious side effects are very rare.

For more details about side effects, visit health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination and check the Consumer Medicines Information (CMI).

If you are worried about side effects, contact your GP. They can also report any concerns to the local public health unit.

Q. How can I get a record of my child's vaccinations?

Your child's vaccination details will be added to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Parents can get a copy of their child's Immunisation History Statement until the child turns 14. Students aged 14 and older can get their own record. You can access it:

- through your Medicare online account at my.gov.au
- using the Medicare Express Plus App at servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-mobile-apps
- by calling the AIR General Enquiries Line at 1800 653 809.