

Meningococcal Vaccine: Why Preteens and Teens Should Get It

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by a bacterium. It can cause meningitis, which is an infection of the brain and spinal cord, and it can also cause blood infections. The infection can cause death or lifelong disability.

About 375 people get the disease each year, and about 10 to 15 out of 100 people infected with meningococcal disease die. Of those who survive, up to one out of five have permanent disabilities, such as deafness, brain damage, loss of limbs, or seizures.

A person with meningococcal disease may become seriously ill very quickly. Antibiotics can treat meningococcal infections, but often can't be given soon enough to help.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is most common in infants less than 1 year of age. Teens are less likely to be infected than infants, but disease levels increase in adolescence starting around age 11, and peak around age 19 years.

What are the symptoms of meningitis?

Symptoms can include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Very stiff neck
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light
- Vomiting
- Exhaustion

If a person has a blood disease, a rash may also develop. Early symptoms can easily be mistaken for influenza or other illnesses. Contact your health care provider immediately if you have symptoms.

How does meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal disease is spread by contact with secretions (saliva or spit) from the nose and throat. Kissing, sharing silverware, drinking directly from the same container, sharing a cigarette or lipstick, coughing, and having close social contact (living in the same household) are examples of how this disease spreads.

How can you prevent meningococcal disease?

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent meningococcal disease.

Other ways for everyone to prevent infection include washing your hands often and avoiding sharing silverware, drinking containers, lipstick, and smoking materials.

What are the options for meningococcal vaccine?

Meningococcal vaccine (MenACWY) is highly effective at protecting against four strains of the meningococcal bacteria. Three strains are common in the United States and the fourth strain protects travelers to certain countries where the disease is more common.

The MenACWY vaccine does not contain the meningococcal B strain that is more commonly found in infants and may cause some cases in adolescents. There is an additional vaccine, meningococcal B vaccine (MenB), that contains the B strain. If your clinic does not carry the MenB vaccine, you can ask them to order it for you, or to refer you to another clinic that has the vaccine. Talk to your health care provider about getting this additional vaccine.

Who should get the meningococcal vaccines?

All children ages 11 through 12 years should receive meningococcal vaccine (MenACWY) followed by a booster dose at age 16 years. Vaccination is also recommended for all adolescents ages 13 through 18 years who did not receive a dose at age 11-12 years.

Individuals ages 2 months and older who have certain conditions that weaken their immune system should receive meningococcal vaccine, including teens who are HIV positive. These persons should also receive booster shots every three to five years depending on their age. Talk to your health care provider if your preteen or teen has a condition that makes it harder for their body to fight off infection.

The MenB vaccine may also be given at age 16 years along with the MenACWY booster dose. MenB vaccine is also recommended for children age 10 years and older with certain high-risk conditions. The number of doses needed depends on the product used and if your child has a high-risk condition. Talk to your health care provider about this additional vaccine.

What are the risks from meningococcal vaccines?

Most people have mild side effects from the vaccine, such as redness or pain where the shot was given. A vaccine, like any medicine, may cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. This risk is extremely small. Getting the meningococcal vaccine is much safer than getting the disease.

You can learn more on the [Vaccine Information Statements](http://www.immunize.org/vis/) (www.immunize.org/vis/) for meningococcal ACWY and meningococcal B.

Are free or low-cost meningococcal shots available?

Yes, if you don't have insurance or your insurance does not cover the cost of the meningococcal vaccines, you may be able to find free or low-cost meningococcal shots.

- Talk to your doctor or clinic to see if they participate in the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program. If the person in need of vaccination is 18 years old or younger, they may be eligible for no-cost vaccines. However, there may be an administration fee of up to \$21.22 per shot.
- Talk to your city or county health department. They may be able to provide low-cost meningococcal shots.

How can I learn more?

Talk to your doctor or clinic, or call your local health department's immunization program. You can also find information on these websites:

- [MDH: Meningococcal Disease](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/meningococcal/) (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/meningococcal/)
- [CDC: Meningococcal Vaccination](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mening/index.html) (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mening/index.html)
- [National Meningitis Association](http://www.nmaus.org) (www.nmaus.org)

Vaccine Preventable Disease Section
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-5503 or 1-800-657-3970
www.health.state.mn.us/immunize

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.