

Meningococcal group C disease

Immunisation information

The National Immunisation Program Schedule provides free meningococcal group C vaccine to children at 12 months of age.

Meningococcal group C disease

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called meningococci. There are different groups of meningococci, however it is mainly group B and group C that cause disease in Victoria. Meningococci are common bacteria found at the back of the nose and throat mostly in children and young adults and less often in adults. The bacteria are usually 'carried' harmlessly but occasionally they can cause meningococcal disease in another person.

Meningococcal disease commonly occurs in one of two forms—meningitis or septicaemia. 'Meningitis' means an inflammation of the protective coverings of the brain and spinal cord. 'Septicaemia' means infection within the bloodstream and is widespread throughout the body. Meningococcal disease is a rare but very serious illness. The infection can develop very quickly and can be fatal in about one in 10 cases; others may be affected for life.

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Pale or blotchy complexion
- Vomiting
- Lethargy
- Rash of red purple spots or bruises

Signs and symptoms appear quickly and people may become seriously unwell within a few hours.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

The disease is difficult to spread. The germs cannot live for more than a few seconds outside the body, therefore they cannot be picked up from water supplies, swimming pools, buildings or factories. Only regular close prolonged household and intimate contact spreads the bacteria. Close contacts in residential accommodation, university campuses and military barracks, may be at greater risk of meningococcal disease.

People who get meningococcal disease are more likely to be in close contact with smokers.

Meningococcal group C vaccines

A vaccine is available that can give long lasting protection against meningococcal group C disease.

There is no vaccine currently available for meningococcal group B disease in Australia.

There is another type of meningococcal vaccine available that covers several groups including C, however it cannot be given to children under two years of age and only protects for one to five years. This vaccine is considered a 'travel' vaccine for travellers to Africa and for pilgrims attending the annual Hajj (Saudi Arabian authorities require a valid certificate of vaccination as a condition to enter the country).

There are different brands of meningococcal group C vaccine available. The vaccines contain meningococcal group C 'sugars' joined with an inactive protein of either diphtheria or tetanus toxoid and additives aluminium phosphate or hydroxide.

Who is eligible for free vaccine?

Children turning 12 months will receive this vaccine with their other routine immunisations due at that age.

Who should be immunised?

- Any person who has had previous meningococcal disease (including group C disease)
- Transplant recipients or people with a damaged (or no) spleen

Possible side effects of meningococcal group C vaccine

Common side effects

- Some swelling, redness and soreness at the injection site
- Low grade fever
- Crying, irritability
- A temporary small lump at the injection site
- Decreased appetite
- In adults/adolescents, headache

If mild reactions do occur, the side effects can be reduced by:

- Placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site
- Not overdressing
- Taking paracetamol to lower fever (note the recommended dose for the age of your child)
- Having extra fluids to drink

Extremely rare side effects

- Severe allergic reaction

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor or hospital.

Important information

The meningococcal group C vaccine only protects from one of the groups of meningococcal disease. There is no vaccine currently available for meningococcal group B disease in Australia. If your child has an illness where you are concerned about meningococcal disease, please see a doctor as soon as possible.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before you or your child are immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply:

- Have had *Mencevax*[®] or *Menomune*[®] vaccine within the last six months
- Are unwell on the day of immunisation
- Have had a severe reaction to any vaccine
- Are pregnant

Further information

The following websites offer resources and further information

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

www.immunise.health.gov.au



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