

# Are you aged 14–18 years old?

Protect yourself against meningitis and septicaemia



If you are aged 14–18 years old (or aged up to 25 years and starting university for the first time this year) you need to get the MenACWY vaccination before you leave school or soon after. This leaflet explains why.

# Meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease is a rare but life-threatening disease caused by meningococcal bacteria which are divided into several groups. The most common are A, B, C, W and Y. Infants, young children, teenagers and young adults have the highest risk of meningococcal disease.

In the UK over the past few years there has been an increase in the number of cases of meningococcal W (MenW) disease and there is no sign of the numbers declining. Older teenagers and young adults are more at risk of getting meningitis and septicaemia from MenW.

This is why it's important that young people aged 14–18 (including those in school years 11–14) have MenACWY vaccination to protect against meningococcal disease.

**A catch-up programme will begin in August and will take two years to complete.**

- It will start with GPs inviting young people born between 2 July 1996 and 1 July 1997 to have the MenACWY vaccine. School year 12 will be offered vaccination in school.
- The MenACWY vaccine will then replace the teenage MenC vaccine usually offered to year 11 students by school health teams and will become the routine vaccination for teenagers.

Young people aged up to 25 years old who are going to university for the first time should also ask their GP for the vaccine before they start university.



## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal bacteria can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning). Both diseases are very serious and, especially if not diagnosed early, they can kill.

The early symptoms of meningococcal disease are similar to those of flu, so you need to be able to recognise the symptoms very quickly (even if you have been vaccinated, the vaccines offered through the routine immunisation programme do not protect against all forms of the disease).

A full description of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can be found at [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org) and [www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org) or see page 6 and 7.

## What causes meningococcal disease?

There are five main groups of meningococcal bacteria that can cause meningitis and septicaemia – A, B, C, W and Y. The same bacteria that cause these serious diseases are also commonly carried in the back of the nose and throat, especially in young adults.

## How common is it?

Meningococcal group C disease is now rare since MenC vaccination was introduced to the national immunisation programme in 1999. MenB is now the most common cause of meningococcal disease in children and young adults, while MenW and MenY used to mainly cause serious illness in older adults. Recently, however, there has been a large increase in MenW disease in the UK, resulting in several deaths among infants and teenagers.

## Why do I need to get the vaccine?

As an older teenager, you are at higher risk of getting MenW meningococcal disease, so you need to get vaccinated to protect yourself.

Vaccination also reduces the risk of you carrying the bacteria and so protects other people around you. You may have had a MenC vaccination as a baby and again more recently but this will not protect you against other meningococcal groups. Even if you recently had the MenC vaccine, for example in school, you should still get the MenACWY vaccine when it is offered to you. The MenACWY vaccine will increase your protection against MenC and help to protect you against three other meningococcal groups (A, W and Y). It is still important to know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia because there are many other bacteria that can also cause these illnesses, including the group B strain, which is not covered by this vaccination.

## What do I need to do if I my date of birth is between 2 July 1996 and 1 July 1997?

You will get an invitation from your GP to have the vaccine this summer, if you haven't heard from your GP by late September, contact your practice to check what their arrangements are. Students in lower school years will be offered the vaccine through schools or general practice, over the next two years.

## What do I need to do if I'm planning to go to university in autumn 2015?

New university students are at particularly high risk in the first weeks of term. We recommend that you get the vaccine from your GP **before** you go to university. If you are aged up to 25 years and are starting university for the first time, you should also ask your GP for the vaccine. You should always register with a GP in the area when you start university and you can arrange to get the vaccine there if you have not had the vaccine before you get to university. You should do that straight away – ideally in your first week of term – don't leave it till later.

## My date of birth is between 2 July 1996 and 1 July 1997, but I left school a while ago and I am not going to university, should I still get the vaccine?

Yes, everyone with this date of birth should get the vaccine, whether they have just finished school or not. It is really important that as many people as possible born at this time have the vaccine, as the vaccine will not only protect you, but also the people around you.

## Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine has been used for many years across the world and has an excellent safety record. Serious side effects from the vaccine are rare.

## Are there any reasons why I should not be immunised?

There are very few reasons why you should not be immunised. You should let your GP or nurse know if you:

- have a very high temperature or fever;
- have had a bad reaction to any immunisation;
- have had a severe allergy to anything;
- have had a bleeding disorder;
- are pregnant.

These don't always mean that you can't be immunised but it helps the doctor or nurse decide which are the best immunisations for you and whether they need to give you any other advice. A family history of illness is never a reason not to be vaccinated.

## Does the vaccination hurt? What are the common side effects?

It's like a sting. You may get soreness and some redness and swelling in your arm after the injection - you may also get a headache, but these symptoms should disappear after one or two days. If you feel unwell after the immunisation, you can take paracetamol or ibuprofen. Read the instructions on the packet carefully and take the correct dose for your age. If necessary, take a second dose six hours later. If your temperature is still high after the second dose, speak to your GP.

***Remember, if you are under 16 you should not take medicines that contain aspirin.***

## I recently had the meningitis C vaccine, do I need to have the ACWY vaccine as well?

Yes, even if you recently had the MenC vaccine, for example in school, you should still get the MenACWY vaccine when it is offered to you. The MenACWY vaccine will increase your protection against MenC and help to protect you against three other meningococcal groups (A, W and Y).

## When will I get the vaccination?

It is recommended that all teenagers aged 14–18 years old have the MenACWY vaccination before or soon after they leave school. The catch-up programme will start in August 2015 and will take two years to complete. With so many pupils to vaccinate, the programme will be rolled out gradually, with those born between 2 July 1996 and 1 July 1997 offered the vaccine first. These older teenagers are at greatest risk of the disease especially when starting university where they will come into contact with many new people of a similar age. Even if you are not going on to university, it is really important you still get the vaccine from your GP.

In addition, all year 11 students will be offered the MenACWY vaccine routinely instead of the MenC vaccine.

## Do I have to have it?

All vaccinations in the UK are voluntary but it's recommended that everybody in this age group has the MenACWY vaccine to help protect themselves and others, such as young infants, who may be particularly susceptible to meningococcal disease. You, or your parent/guardian, have to consent to have the vaccine.

## What if I want the vaccination but my parents don't agree?

If you can show that you understand the benefits and risks of MenACWY vaccination, you can consent to have the vaccine. But it is hoped that you will discuss the matter as a family and come to a shared decision.

## What if I want more information before consenting?

If you feel you need more information about any aspect of vaccination you or your parents can always speak to the nurse or GP. You can visit the NHS choices website or contact the meningitis charities listed at the end of this leaflet.

**Meningitis and septicaemia are very serious and require urgent attention. If you think you've got either, get help immediately and make sure your fellow students know to look out for you and each other.**

## Look out for any of these symptoms

- Fever, cold hands and feet
- Vomiting and diarrhoea
- Drowsiness, difficult to wake up
- Irritability and/or confusion
- Dislike of bright lights
- Severe headache or muscle pains
- Pale, blotchy skin with or without a rash
- Convulsions/seizures
- Stiff neck



## Do the glass test

Someone with septicaemia may develop a few spots or a widespread rash with fever. Later on the rash can develop into purple blotches that do not fade under pressure. You can do a test for this by pressing the side of a drinking glass against the rash. If you have a fever and a rash, and the rash does not fade under pressure, get medical help immediately by calling 999 or getting someone to take you to the nearest hospital emergency department. Never wait for a rash, though. It can be a late sign or may not appear at all. If someone is ill and getting worse get medical help immediately.



## How can I find out more?

There is more information about the MenACWY vaccination on the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/Meningitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Meningitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx) or you can talk to your GP, nurse or university health centre if you have any questions.

The following charities also provide information, advice and support:

### **Meningitis Now**

24 hour helpline

0808 80 10 388

[www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org)

### **Meningitis Research Foundation**

Free helpline 080 8800 3344 (9am to 10pm weekdays, 10am to 8pm weekends and holidays) [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org)

If you would like further information about immunisation, visit [www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)  
or [www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations)

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