



## What You Need to Know about Serogroup B Meningococcal Disease Frequently Asked Questions

Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk of meningococcal disease, often referred to as meningitis, a serious disease that can lead to lifelong complications and even death. The disease is caused by many different types (serogroups) of bacteria. The routinely recommended meningitis vaccine protects against 4 major serogroups (A, C, W, and Y) and is recommended for all individuals at age 11 to 12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years.

However, the routine vaccine does not protect against one of the most common causes of the disease: serogroup B. Vaccines to protect against serogroup B only became available in the US in 2014 and very few have received it.

Talk to a healthcare professional to learn more about meningococcal disease and vaccines available to help prevent it.

### **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial infection caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*. The bacteria can invade the body, leading to severe swelling of the tissue surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) or infection of the bloodstream. Three different types of the bacteria (serogroups B, C, and Y) cause the majority of disease in the US.

### **Why is meningococcal disease serious?**

Meningococcal disease is one of the most serious vaccine-preventable diseases. Even with treatment, approximately one out of every 10 people who get the disease will die and two in 10 will suffer serious and permanent complications including brain damage, kidney damage, hearing loss, and amputation of arms, legs, fingers, or toes.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Early meningococcal disease symptoms are often similar to the flu which can cause a delay in diagnosis and treatment. Symptoms usually progress very quickly and may include some combination of high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion, and a purplish rash. Death can happen in as little as 24-48 hours.

Students who experience these symptoms, especially if they are unusually sudden, progressive, or severe, should be examined as soon as possible by a healthcare professional.

### **How does meningococcal disease spread?**

Meningococcal disease is spread from person to person. The bacteria are spread by exchanging respiratory and throat secretions (saliva or spit) during close or lengthy contact (for example, sharing drinking glasses or kissing).

The bacteria live in the nose and throat of about 10 percent of the population. Although some people who have the bacteria may show no signs and symptoms of the disease, they can still transmit it to others.

### **How can meningococcal disease be prevented?**

Vaccination is the best protection against this disease. There are two types of vaccines available to help protect against it:

- Routine vaccination with a vaccine that protects against four major meningococcal serogroups (A, C, W, and Y) is recommended for all adolescents at age 11-12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years. Many colleges require this vaccination prior to enrollment. Most teens get the first dose, but only three in 10 get the booster dose, which is very important to maintain protection.
- Meningococcal serogroup B vaccination may be recommended by healthcare professionals for anyone age 16-23 years, with a preferred age of 16-18 years.

Even if you have been vaccinated, there is still a chance you can develop a meningococcal infection. So it's important to know the symptoms. Early recognition and prompt medical attention are very important.

### **Why is serogroup B meningococcal disease of particular concern?**

Serogroup B is the most common cause of meningococcal disease in US adolescents and young adults. It is also the cause of recent college outbreaks of the disease.

Parents may think their children are protected against meningococcal disease because they received the routinely recommended quadrivalent vaccine (ACWY) – but, that vaccine does not protect against serogroup B disease. Adolescents and young adults may request the serogroup B vaccine from their healthcare professional.

### **Will insurance cover vaccines against serogroup B disease?**

Yes. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program will provide serogroup B vaccines at no cost for eligible students (up to 18 years of age) who might not otherwise be vaccinated due to an inability to pay. Private insurers are also likely to cover serogroup B vaccines. Check with your individual insurance provider or student health center for coverage information.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Visit the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) website: [www.nfid.org/meningitis](http://www.nfid.org/meningitis).