



## Meningococcal Vaccines

### What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by bacteria. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 through 18 years old in the United States.

Meningitis is an infection of fluid surrounding the brain and the spinal cord. Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections.

About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. 5 to 10 percent of these people die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, another 11 to 19 percent lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become mentally retarded, or suffer seizures or strokes.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. But it is most common in infants less than one year of age and people with certain medical conditions, such as lack of a spleen. College freshmen who live in dormitories have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal infections can be treated with drugs such as penicillin. Still, about 1 out of every ten people who get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life. This is why preventing the disease through use of meningococcal vaccine is important for people at highest risk.

### Meningococcal vaccine

Two meningococcal vaccines are available in the U.S.:

Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (M.P.S.V.4) has been available since the 1970s. (Menoimmune)

Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (M.C.V.4) was licensed in 2005. (Menectra)

Both vaccines can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the United States and a type that causes epidemics in Africa. Meningococcal vaccines cannot prevent all types of the disease. But they do protect many people who might become sick if they didn't get the vaccine.

- Both vaccines work well, and protect about 90 percent of those who get it.
- M.C.V.4 is expected to give better, longer-lasting protection.
- M.C.V.4 should also be better at preventing the disease from spreading from person to person.

### Who should get meningococcal vaccine and when?

- M.C.V.4 is recommended for all children at their routine preadolescent visit (11 to 12 years of age). For those who have never gotten M.C.V.4 previously, a dose is recommended at high school entry.
- College freshmen living in dormitories.

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- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common or have reported out break at that time of travel, such as parts of Africa or Asia.
- Anyone who has a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed.
- Anyone who has terminal complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder).
- People who might have been exposed to meningitis during an outbreak.
- M.C.V.4 is the preferred vaccine for people 11 to 55 years of age in these risk groups, but M.P.S.V.4 can be used if M.C.V.4 is not available. M.P.S.V.4 should be used for children 2 to 10 years old and adults over 55, who are at risk.

## How Many Doses?

People 2 years of age and older should get 1 dose. (Sometimes an additional dose is recommended for people who remain at high risk.)

M.P.S.V.4 may be recommended for children 3 months to 2 years of age under special circumstances. These children should get 2 doses, 3 months apart.

## Some people should not get meningococcal vaccine or should wait.

- Anyone who has ever had a severe (life-threatening) allergic reaction to a previous dose of either meningococcal vaccine should not get another dose.
- Anyone who has a severe (life threatening) allergy to any vaccine component should not get the vaccine. Tell us if you have any severe allergies.
- Anyone who is moderately or severely ill at the time the shot is scheduled should probably wait until they recover.
- Anyone who has ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome should talk with us before getting M.C.V. 4.
- Meningococcal vaccines may be given to pregnant women. However, M.C.V.4 is a new vaccine and has not been studied in pregnant women as much as M.P.S.V.4 has. It should be used only if clearly needed.

## What are the risks from meningococcal vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. The risk of meningococcal vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

## Mild problems

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- Up to about half of people who get meningococcal vaccines have mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot was given. If these problems occur, they usually last for 1 or 2 days. They are more common after M.C.V.4 than after M.P.S.V.4.
- A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine develop a fever.

### **Severe problems**

Serious allergic reactions, within a few minutes to a few hours of the shot, are very rare.

**A few cases of Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a serious nervous system disorder, have been reported among people who got MCV4. There is not enough evidence yet to tell whether they were caused by the vaccine.** This is being investigated by health officials.

### **What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?**

- Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.
- Call a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or health department to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form. Or you can file this report through the VAERS web site at [w.w.w. dot vaers dot h.h.s. dot g.o.v.](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov), or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

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