

# Protect yourself against meningitis and septicaemia



**This leaflet tells you about the MenACWY vaccine offered to teenagers and young people and what you need to do.**

**This leaflet explains why it's important that teenagers and young people born after the 1st September 1996 and under the age of 25 years old should receive the MenACWY vaccine.**

## **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is a rare but life-threatening disease caused by several groups of meningococcal bacteria, the most common of which are A, B, C, W and Y. Meningococcal bacteria can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning).

Both diseases are very serious, especially if not diagnosed early – they can even be fatal.

The same bacteria that cause these serious diseases are also commonly carried in the back of the nose and throat, especially in older teenagers and young adults, without causing any illness.

## How common is it?

Meningococcal disease affects around 700–800 people in England and Wales every year. Since the introduction of MenC vaccination into the UK routine vaccination programme in 1999 Meningococcal group C disease is now rare.

Meningococcal group B (MenB) is now the most common cause of meningococcal disease in children and young adults. From September 2015 MenB vaccine has been introduced to the routine infant vaccination programme to help protect young babies.

Since 2009, there has been a large increase in cases of Meningococcal group W (MenW) disease in England and Wales, resulting in several deaths among infants and teenagers.



## Why do I need to get the vaccine?

Older teenagers are at higher risk of getting 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 need this vaccine even if you have previously received MenC vaccine as MenACWY vaccine will offer protection against meningococcal C disease as well as offering additional protection against W, A and Y disease.

It will still be important to know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia because there are other bacteria that can also cause these illnesses.



# What are the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease?

Look out for any of these symptoms



Fever,  
cold hands  
and feet



Vomiting



Drowsy,  
difficult  
to wake



Confusion  
and irritability



Severe  
muscle  
pain



Pale,  
blotchy skin  
Spots/rash  
See [Glass Test](#)



Severe  
headache



Stiff neck



Dislike  
bright  
lights



Convulsions/  
seizures

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## Do the glass test

Someone with septicaemia may develop a rash of tiny “pin pricks” which can turn into purple bruising. This rash does not fade under pressure. You can do the glass test by pressing the side of a drinking glass against the rash. If the spots don't fade under pressure, get medical help immediately.

Never wait for a rash. It can be a late sign or may not appear at all.

Septicaemia can occur with or without meningitis. Not everyone gets all the symptoms and they can appear in any order. Make sure you know the signs and symptoms and look out for each other.

**Meningitis and septicaemia are very serious and require urgent attention, get medical help immediately. If you can't get in touch with your doctor, ring 999 or go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital.**



## **Who is eligible for the MenACWY vaccine?**

Teenagers aged 13–14 years of age (school year 9) are routinely offered the MenACWY vaccine alongside the Td/IPV (teenage booster vaccine).

Young people born after the 1st September 1996 and under the age of 25 also remain eligible to receive the MenACWY vaccine.

You only need the vaccine once.

## **How will I know when I am due to receive the vaccination?**

For pupils in year 9, in areas in Wales where the teenage booster vaccinations are offered in school, you will be sent a consent form for completion prior to the school vaccination session.

In areas that don't offer the teenage booster vaccines in school, your GP surgery will contact you to offer an appointment to attend for vaccination.

If you have missed or are planning to attend university for the first time and have not already received the vaccine you are advised to contact your GP surgery as soon as possible. Ideally the vaccine should be given at least two weeks before starting university.

## **Must I have it?**

All vaccinations in the UK are voluntary but it's recommended that all eligible teenagers and young people have the vaccination not only to protect themselves from very serious illnesses but also others, including infants who may be particularly susceptible to infection.

You, or your parent/guardian if you are under 16, have to give consent for you to have the vaccine.

If you receive a consent form at school make sure you and your parent or guardian read the information, sign it and return the form to school as soon as possible.

## **Is the vaccine safe?**

The vaccine has been used for many years across the world and has an excellent safety record.

## Are there any side effects?

Your arm may be sore with some swelling, redness or tenderness where you have had the injection. Sometimes a small painless lump develops, but this usually disappears within a few weeks. More serious effects are rare but include fever, headache, dizziness, feeling sick and swollen glands. Very rarely, some people have an allergic reaction soon after a vaccination. This may be a rash or itching affecting part or all of the body.

Even more rarely, some people can have a severe reaction soon after vaccination, which causes breathing difficulties and may cause them to collapse. This is called an anaphylactic reaction and can happen with other medicines and food. These reactions are extremely rare and nurses are trained to manage them. People who have an anaphylactic reaction can be successfully treated and usually recover within a few hours.

If you have a fever and feel unwell after the immunisation, take paracetamol or ibuprofen. Read the instructions on the bottle or packet carefully and take the correct dose for your age. If necessary, take a second dose four to six hours later. If your temperature is still high after the second dose, speak to your GP or call the free NHS Direct Wales helpline on **0845 46 47**.

**Remember never give medicines that contain aspirin to children under 16.**

Young people or their parents/guardians can report suspected side effects of vaccines through the Yellow Card scheme. This can be done online at <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk> or by calling the Yellow Card hotline on **0800 731 6789** (Monday to Friday 10am to 2pm).

## What if I miss the vaccination before I go to university?

First time university students are at particularly high risk in the first weeks of term therefore every effort should be made to have the vaccine before you start. If you have not received it you can go to the University Health Centre or register with a GP at university and arrange to get the vaccine there, but try and do that straight away – ideally in ‘freshers’ week – don’t delay it, the sooner you have it the better.



## Where can I get more information?

You can find out more about the vaccine, including its contents and possible side effects at [www.medicines.org.uk/emc/](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/) by entering the name of the vaccine in the search box and looking at the patient information leaflet (PIL). The vaccines currently used are Nimenrix and Menveo.

The routine immunisation schedule that shows you which immunisations are offered in Wales is available from [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/)

If you have any questions talk to your doctor, practice nurse, school nurse or, call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47**, or **111** if this service is available in your area.



## Where can I get more information?

For more information on the MenACWY vaccine visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/ACWY/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/ACWY/)

The following charities also provide information, advice and support on meningitis and meningococcal disease:

### **Meningitis Now**

24 hour helpline 0808 80 10 388 (9am to 5pm weekdays, or email [helpline@meningitisnow.org](mailto:helpline@meningitisnow.org) during office hours only) [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)

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