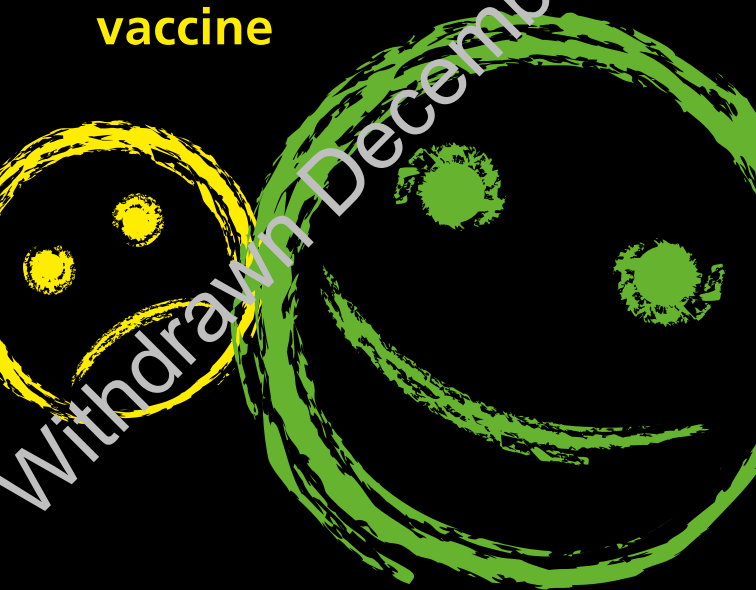


In school years 9 or 10?

Protect yourself against

meningitis AND  
septicaemia

▶ Have the MenACWY  
vaccine



This leaflet tells you why it is important  
to have the MenACWY vaccine.

 **immunisation**

the safest way to protect your health

# MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

is a rare but life-threatening disease caused by meningococcal bacteria. Teenagers and young adults are in one of the highest risk groups for this disease.

This leaflet explains why it's important that students in school years 9 to 10 have MenACWY vaccination to protect against meningococcal disease.



Withdrawn December 2024

## **What is MenACWY vaccine?**

MenACWY vaccine protects against four common groups of meningococcal disease – MenA, MenC, MenW and MenY. You should receive an invitation to have this vaccine when you are in school year 9 or 10 (aged 13-15 years). You need this vaccine even if you had a meningococcal vaccine when you were younger.

## **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease can cause both meningitis and septicaemia. Meningitis is when bacteria reach the meninges (the lining around the brain and spinal cord) and cause dangerous swelling. Septicaemia is when bacteria enter the bloodstream and cause blood poisoning which can trigger sepsis. Sepsis is an overwhelming and life-threatening immune response to any infection and can lead to tissue damage, organ failure and death.

Meningococcal disease is rare but very serious and requires urgent hospital treatment. It can lead to life-changing disabilities such as amputations, hearing loss, brain damage and scars.

## **What causes meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is caused by different groups of meningococcal bacteria. In the UK it is almost always caused by one of four meningococcal groups commonly known as MenB, MenC, MenW or MenY. These can be prevented with vaccines. MenA disease is rare in the UK but can also be prevented by vaccination.

## What are the common signs and symptoms?

Initially meningococcal disease can be like a bad case of flu. But anyone affected will usually become seriously ill within a few hours. Early treatment can save your life so it is sensible to be aware of some main signs and symptoms. It is important to know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia even if you are vaccinated as there are many other bacteria that can cause these illnesses, including the group B strain that is not covered by the ACWY vaccine.

## Be aware of these common signs and symptoms

High temperature	Cold hands and feet
Vomiting/diarrhoea	Pale blotchy skin
Stomach cramps	Rash/bruising rash*
Joint or muscle pain	Confusion and/or irritability
Severe headache	Drowsy or difficult to wake
Stiff neck	Seizures/fits
Dislike of bright light	
Rapid breathing	

One or more of these symptoms may develop and they can appear in any order and be mixed between the two illnesses. It is important to seek early medical advice if you or a friend have symptoms of concern or a condition that is getting rapidly worse.

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)

\*On dark skin, check inside the eyelids or roof of the mouth where the spots may be more visible.

## **Why do I need to get the vaccine?**

Older teenagers and young adults are at higher risk of getting meningococcal disease, so you need to get vaccinated now to protect yourself. Vaccination also reduces the risk of other people around you becoming infected. You may have had MenC vaccination as a baby and toddler but this will not protect you against other meningococcal groups.

The MenACWY vaccine will increase your protection against MenC and help to protect you against three other meningococcal groups (A, W and Y).

## **Do I have to have MenACWY vaccine?**

No, but the best way to help protect yourself is by having the MenACWY vaccine. 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. It's good to discuss the matter as a family and come to a shared decision.

## **Does MenACWY vaccine protect against Men B?**

No, Men B is caused by another group of the bacteria which commonly affects young infants. A different vaccine, which protects against MenB, is given to very young babies. Some adults and older children considered at risk may be eligible on the NHS. You can find out more about how to get the MenB vaccine through the charity websites listed overleaf.

## **What if I want more information?**

See the information provided at the end of the leaflet.

## **What do I need to do if I'm now in an older school year group or have left school?**

If you were born on or after 1 September 1996 and eligible but missed your teenage MenACWY vaccine you can still have the vaccine up to your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. If you are older and starting university for the first time, you can still have the vaccine up to your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. If you are still at school you should talk to your school provider otherwise you will need to make an appointment with your GP practice.

## **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.

## **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 at any time after vaccination, you should contact your GP.

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

### **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\*.



\*On dark skin, check inside the eyelids or roof of the mouth where the spots may be more visible.

## 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](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis)

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[www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/meningitis-b-vaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/meningitis-b-vaccine)

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[www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations)

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[www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/men-acwy-vaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/men-acwy-vaccine)

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[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vaccinations/Pages/men-acwy-vaccine.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/vaccinations/Pages/men-acwy-vaccine.aspx) or you can talk to your GP or university health centre if you have any questions.

The following charities also provide information, advice and support:

### **Meningitis Now**

Freephone Meningitis Helpline

0808 80 10 388

9am to 10pm every day

[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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[www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/men-acwy-vaccine/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/men-acwy-vaccine/)