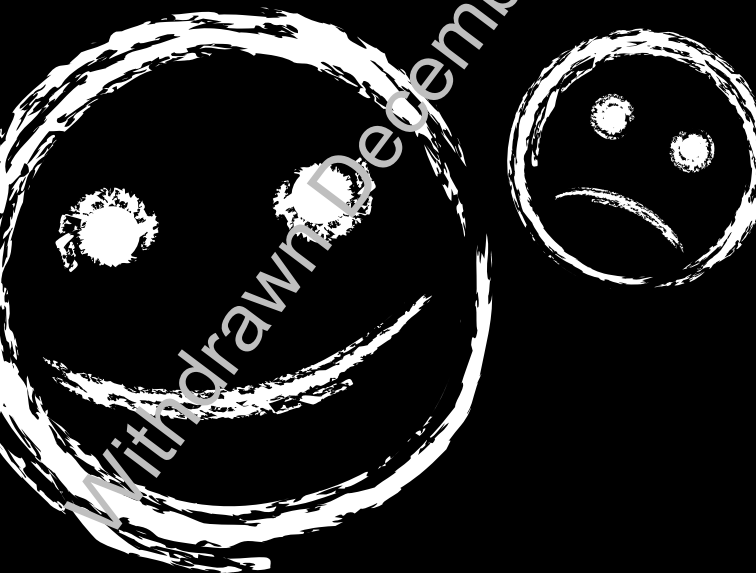


**Are you starting university  
in England?**

**Protect yourself against**

**meningitis AND  
septicaemia**



You need to get the  
MenACWY vaccination before you  
start uni or soon after. This leaflet  
tells you what to expect next.

# 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.

This leaflet explains why it's important that new university entrants have MenACWY vaccination to protect against meningococcal disease.



Withdrawn December 2024

Since 2009 there has been a year on year 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. A catch-up programme offering a MenACWY vaccination to all 13- to 19-year-olds and new university entrants began in August 2015.

### **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 can kill, especially if not diagnosed early.

The early symptoms of meningococcal disease are similar to those of flu, so you need to be able to recognise the symptoms very quickly. You may have had a meningococcal vaccine before but it will 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)

### **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 this serious disease are also commonly carried in the back of the nose and throat, especially in young adults.

## How common is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal group C disease is now rare since MenC vaccination was introduced 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. Since 2009 there has been a large increase in MenW disease in England, resulting in several deaths among infants and teenagers.

In late summer 2015

- MenB vaccine became part of the routine infant programme to help protect young babies, and
- MenACWY vaccine replaced the teenage MenC vaccine and became the routine vaccination given in school years 9 or 10.

### 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

## Why do I need to get the vaccine?

As a young adult, you are at 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. This should, in turn, prevent the numbers increasing to serious levels. You may have had a MenC vaccination previously 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). It is still important to know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia because there are many other bacteria that can cause these illnesses, including the group B strain that is not covered by this vaccination.

## I'm an overseas student, do I still need the vaccination?

Yes, both UK-born and overseas students should have the vaccination before they start university, or soon after. Make sure you register with a GP as soon as you arrive and arrange to have the vaccine.

## When will I get the vaccination?

It is recommended that **all** first time university entrants ('freshers') up to 25 years old should have the MenACWY vaccine before or soon after they start university. New university students are at particularly high risk in the first weeks of term when they will come into contact with many new people of a similar age.

### **Do I have to have it?**

No, but the best way to help protect yourself is by having the MenACWY vaccine. You have to consent to have the vaccine.

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

See the information provided at the end of this leaflet.

### **What do I need to do if I'm starting university this autumn?**

New university students are at particularly high risk in the first weeks of term. 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 haven't already had it. You should do that straight away – ideally before you start university or as soon as possible after – don't leave it till later.


### **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.



## How can I find out more?

There is more information about the MenACWY vaccination on the NHS Choices website at [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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2748602 4p 75k Aug 16 (ESP)  
First printed August 2015  
Produced by Williams Lea for Public Health England.