

Understanding Meningococcal B Vaccine

Helping Parents Decide

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection caused by bacteria called “*Neisseria meningitides*”, which cause meningitis (infection of the protective covering of the brain and spinal cord) and septicemia (infection of the blood stream). Meningitis can be fatal or lead to permanent disabilities such as hearing loss and brain damage. Septicemia can also be fatal or cause serious damage to organs and skin sometimes resulting in amputation of toes, fingers or limbs.

Of the many serogroups (types) of these bacteria, five cause most of the disease (A, B, C, W and Y). We routinely give a meningococcal vaccine at age 11 years, with a booster dose given at age 16 years, that helps prevent infection from four of the groups (A, C, W and Y).

In early 2015, vaccines to help prevent infection by serogroup B were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Center for Disease Control (CDC) with a “Category A” recommendation (for everyone in a particular age or risk factor group). Meningococcal B vaccine is recommended for everyone 10 years and older who have an increased risk for the infection, including:

- Immune deficiencies that involve the “complement pathway”
- People who don’t have a spleen or whose spleen does not function well
- Scientists who routinely work with the bacteria
- People at risk during an outbreak of the disease

In June of 2015 the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) stated that a meningococcal B vaccine series **MAY** be administered to adolescents and adults 16 through 23 years of age without the risk factors listed above. The preferred age for the vaccine is 16 through 18 years, prior to college entrance, since college freshman are at increased risk for meningococcal disease compared to the general population.

This recommendation is “Category B,” meaning that the decision to receive the vaccine is based on individual choice in consultation with your doctor or nurse practitioner. The main reason the ACIP did not recommend routine vaccination for the entire population is that, although the infection can be devastating, the number of cases of infection with meningococcal group B bacteria is low and the cost to society would be high to prevent a small number of infections.

Because the vaccine is NOT universally recommended for all healthy people ages 16 through 23 years, **insurance companies may not provide coverage**. So if you choose to vaccinate your teen, you may be responsible for the cost of the vaccine (around \$210 per dose). Two doses are given at least one month apart. Side effects are mild, including redness at the injection site, nausea and aches.

Please let us know if you have other questions so we can help you decide about choosing meningitis B vaccine for your teen.