

## 6. What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?

### What should I look for?

- Look for 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 heartbeat, or dizziness.

### What should I do?

- **Call** a doctor or get the person to a doctor right away.
- **Tell** your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- **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 [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov), or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

*VAERS does not provide medical advice.*

## 7. The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

A federal program exists to help pay for the care of anyone who has had a rare serious reaction to a vaccine.

For information about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call 1-800-338-2382 or visit the program's website at <http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation>.

## 8. How can I learn more?

- Ask your doctor or nurse. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.

- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Call **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)**

Visit CDC's National Immunization Program website at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

Visit CDC's meningococcal disease website at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/meningococcal_g.htm)

Visit CDC's Travelers' Health website at [wwwn.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel)

# VACCINES

## What You Need to Know



## Meningococcal Vaccine

Information provided through  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Immunization Program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Meningococcal Vaccine

## 1. What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial illness; it is an infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord and is a leading cause of **bacterial meningitis** in children 2-18 years old in the U.S.

Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections.

About 1,00-2,500 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. Even when they are treated with antibiotics, 10-15% of these people die. Of those who survive, another 11-19% 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. However, *college freshmen who live in dormitories, and teenagers 15-19 have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.*

Meningococcal infections can be treated with drugs such as penicillin, yet about 1 out of ever 10 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.

## 2. Meningococcal vaccine

There are 2 kinds of meningococcal vaccine in the United States:

**Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4)**, the preferred vaccine for people 2-55 years of age.

**Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (MPSV4)** which may be used if MCV4 is not available; it is the only meningococcal vaccine licensed for people older than 55.

Both vaccines can prevent **4** types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the U.S. 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 did not get the vaccine. Both vaccines work well and protect about 90% of people who get them. MCV4 is expected to give better, longer-lasting protection.

## 3. Who should get meningococcal vaccine and when?

A dose of MCV4 is recommended for children and adolescents 11-18 years of age. Those who did not get the vaccine during this time should get it at the earliest opportunity.

Meningococcal vaccine is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease:

- College freshmen living in dormitories.
- Microbiologists who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria.
- U.S. military recruits.
- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common, such as parts of Africa.
- 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.

## 4. Who 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 your provider if you have any severe allergies.

- Anyone who is **moderately or severely ill** at any time the shot is scheduled should probably wait until they recover. Ask your provider. People with a **mild illness** can usually get the vaccine.
- Anyone who has ever had **Guillain-Barré Syndrome** should talk with their provider before getting MCV4.
- Meningococcal vaccines may be given to pregnant women. However, MCV4 is a new vaccine and has not been studied in pregnant women as much as MPSV4 has.; it should be used only if clearly needed.
- Meningococcal vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

## 5. Meningococcal vaccine risks

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

- As many as half the 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 1-2 days; they are more common after MCV4 than after MPSV4. 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.
- **Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)** has been reported among some people who received MCV4. This happens so rarely that it is currently not possible to tell if the vaccine might be a factor; even if it is, the risk is very small.