



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Menjugate or NeisVac-C Vaccine

Meningococcal Vaccine

What is meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is caused by a germ (a bacterium) called the meningococcus (more than one is called meningococci)
- Meningococci can cause a very serious infection called meningitis.
- Meningitis is an infection of the fluid and membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. Without treatment, all children who get the disease will die or suffer damage that lasts the rest of their lives.
- Meningococci can also cause septicemia, a very serious infection of the blood that can kill very rapidly.
- Even with treatment, about 1 in 20 children with meningococcal meningitis will die.
- About 1 in 20 children who survive meningitis will have brain damage
- Even with treatment, about 1 in 2 children with meningococcal septicemia will die or have permanent damage.

How can you tell if your child has meningococcal meningitis?

- The earliest symptoms of meningitis are fever and a significant change in behavior such as drowsiness, reduced consciousness, irritability, fussiness and/or agitation.
- Other symptoms include severe headache, vomiting (throwing up), stiff neck, pain on moving head and neck, aches and pains, pain in joints and convulsions.
- About two thirds of children with meningococcal meningitis have a skin rash consisting of red spots that do not disappear when pressed. The spots may get quite large in a short period of time.

How can you tell if your child has meningococcal septicemia?

- The earliest symptoms of septicemia are fever, aches and pains, joint pain and headache.
- The child gets much sicker very quickly (over a few hours), is drowsy, semi-conscious, irritable or agitated.
- Almost all children with septicemia have a skin rash that starts as red spots. The spots increase in number and size very rapidly over a few hours.
- The illness may progress rapidly and be complicated by low blood pressure (shock), coma, convulsions and severe difficulty breathing.

How is meningococcal disease spread?

- Meningococci are quite common and live in the back of the nose and throat in about 1 in 5 adolescents and adults without causing any illness. These individuals are called "healthy carriers"
- The bacteria are extremely fragile and die rapidly outside the body.

- Spread of meningococci most often involves healthy carriers rather than persons ill with visible disease.
- Spread from an infected person to another person requires close, direct contact, through activities such as kissing, coughing and sneezing.
- It can also be spread through saliva when sharing items such as cigarettes, lipstick, food or drinks, cups, water bottles, cans, drinking straws, toothbrushes, toys, mouth guards and musical instruments with mouthpieces.
- The risk of spread is increased by smoking and overcrowding.

How common is meningococcal and disease?

- About 200 to 400 cases of meningococcal disease occur every year in Canada.
- Group B and group C germs cause most infections in Canada.
- Since 1989, outbreaks of group C disease have occurred among adolescents in many parts of Canada. Such outbreaks usually occur in one or two schools in an area and involve fewer than 5 cases.

What can you do to stop the spread of meningococcal disease?

- Get a meningococcal shot. Two kinds of meningococcal vaccine are available. One is more effective in infants and young children. The other one prevents disease in children age 5 and over, adolescents and adults. Your doctor will know which one to give you or your child.
- Family and household members of a person sick with meningococcal disease are often treated with an antibiotic to stop further spread of the germ within the household.

How do you get the vaccine?

- Both forms of meningococcal vaccine are given by injection
- The vaccine is given as a single dose
- Very young infants get 3 shots: one at 2, 4 and 6 months of age. Infants between 4 and 11 months of age receive 2 shots at least 4 weeks apart. Children over 12 months of age get 1 shot.

Who should not have the meningococcal vaccines?

- A person who has a serious allergic reaction after a previous shot of the meningococcal vaccine should not receive it again.

How safe are the vaccines?

- Both forms of the vaccine are very safe
- They often cause redness, swelling and pain at the place where you get the needle.
- Ask your doctor what you can do to control pain or swelling.

***For more information, please contact the Public Health Department
Vaccine Preventable Disease Program at (905) 688-3762 or 1-800-263-7248***

Source: Your Child's Best Shot, A parent's guide to vaccination
Canadian Paediatric Society, 2nd Edition, 2002