

# Meningococcal Disease Facts

## What is meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is a rare, serious illness caused by a bacteria (*Neisseria meningitidis*). It can cause meningitis, which is an infection of the brain and spinal cord, and it can also cause blood, joint, and other serious infections.
- Up to one out of seven (10-14 percent) of those who get the disease die.
- Of those who survive, up to one out of five have permanent disabilities, such as deafness, brain damage, loss of limbs, or seizures.

## What are the symptoms of meningitis?

Symptoms can include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Very stiff neck
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light
- Vomiting
- Exhaustion
- If a person has a blood infection, a rash may also develop.
- Early symptoms can easily be mistaken for viral infections like influenza or other illnesses.
- When symptoms start, they come on quickly and the person may get very sick very fast. Contact your healthcare provider immediately if you have symptoms.

## How does meningococcal disease spread?

- Meningococcal disease is spread by contact with secretions (saliva or spit) from the nose and throat.
- It can be spread through kissing, sharing silverware, drinking directly from the same container, sharing a cigarette or lipstick, and having close social contact (living in the same household).
- It is not spread through casual contact, such as being in the same room or touching the same object.

## Who is at risk?

In general, the risk of becoming infected with meningococcal disease is low, but anyone can get it. However, some people are at increased risk, such as:

- First year college students who live in residential housing.
- People who have an immune disorder called complement deficiency or who are taking complement inhibitors.
- People with HIV infection.
- People with a damaged spleen or whose spleen has been removed.
- Lab personnel who work with the meningococcal bacteria.
- People traveling to or living in areas of the world where meningococcal disease is common or where there is currently a meningococcal outbreak.
- U.S. military recruits.

- Household members or others with close social contact with a meningococcal case.

## How can you prevent meningococcal disease?

- Get vaccinated!
- Avoid sharing anything that goes into your mouth like silverware, drinking containers, lipstick, cigarettes, etc.

## What are the options for meningococcal vaccine?

Meningococcal vaccine (MenACWY) is highly effective at protecting against four strains of the meningococcal bacteria. Three strains are common in the United States and the fourth strain protects travelers to certain countries where the disease is more common.

The MenACWY vaccine does not contain the meningococcal B strain that may cause some cases in adolescents/young adults. The meningococcal B vaccine (MenB) can be given to people age 16-23 years. MenB vaccine is also recommended for people over age 10 years with certain high-risk conditions. If your clinic does not carry the MenB vaccine, you can ask them to order it for you, or to refer you to another clinic that has the vaccine. Talk to your healthcare provider about this additional vaccine.

MenB protection is also available with the pentavalent vaccine MenABCWY. MenABCWY can be given when both Men B and MenACWY are recommended at the same visit. Talk to your healthcare provider about whether Men B or MenABCWY is recommended for you.

## Who should get the meningococcal vaccines?

- All children should get a dose of MenACWY at 11-12 years and a booster dose at 16 years of age.
- First year college students up to age 21 years who live in residential housing should also get a dose of MenACWY if they have not had a dose since they turned 16.
- Adolescents and young adults age 16 through 23 years may choose to receive the meningococcal B vaccine. They should discuss this with their healthcare provider.
- Both MenACWY and MenB are recommended for certain children and adults at risk for meningococcal disease depending on their age. Talk to your healthcare provider about the need for one or both of these vaccines.

## Are free or low-cost meningococcal shots available?

Yes, if you don't have insurance or your insurance does not cover the cost of the meningococcal vaccines, you may be able to find free or low-cost meningococcal shots.

- Talk to your doctor or clinic to see if they participate in the Minnesota Vaccines for Children Program. If the person in need of vaccination is 18 years old or younger, they may be eligible for no-cost vaccines. However, there may be an administration fee of up to \$21.22 per shot.
- Talk to your city or county health department. They may be able to provide low-cost meningococcal shots.

Minnesota Department of Health  
PO Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975  
[www.health.state.mn.us/immunize](http://www.health.state.mn.us/immunize)

10/09/2025

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.