

Minnesota Department of Health

Meningococcal Vaccine: Why Preteens and Teens Should Get It

Preteens should receive a single shot of meningococcal vaccine during their 11-12 year old check-up. If your teenager missed getting the vaccine at his/her check-up, ask the doctor about getting it now.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is an illness caused by a bacteria. It can cause meningitis, a very serious infection around the brain and spinal cord, or a blood infection. The infection can cause death or life-long disability. It often progresses so quickly that a person can be perfectly well and, in just a few hours, be hospitalized in critical condition.

Immunization is the most effective way to prevent this disease. Antibiotics can be used to treat meningococcal infections, but often can't be given soon enough to help.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease, but it is most common in infants less than 1 year of age. While teens are less likely to be infected than infants, disease levels increase in adolescence, around age 11, and peak around age 19.

About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. About 300 of these people die. Of those who recover, about 400 have permanent disabilities such as deafness, mental retardation, loss of limbs, and seizures.

What are the symptoms of meningitis?

Symptoms can include a high fever, headache, a very stiff neck, confusion, nausea, sensitivity to light, vomiting, and exhaustion. A rash may also develop. The person may become seriously ill very quickly and early symptoms can easily be mistaken for the flu. That's why

immunization is so important -- to prevent infection in the first place.

How does meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal disease is spread by close or direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat. Sharing food or beverages, coughing, kissing, and having close social contact (living in the same household or attending childcare) are examples of how this disease spreads.

How can you prevent meningococcal disease?

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent most meningococcal disease.

Other ways for everyone to prevent infection include washing your hands often and avoiding sharing forks, spoons, drinking containers, lipstick, and smoking materials.

What is the meningococcal vaccine?

Meningococcal vaccine (MCV4) protects 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 meningitis is more common. The vaccine does not contain a strain that is more commonly found in infants.

How effective is the meningococcal vaccine?

The vaccine is highly effective at preventing four of the strains of bacteria that cause meningococcal meningitis. Seventy-six percent of cases among 11- 19 year olds are vaccine preventable.



Immunization Program
P.O. Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-5503 or 1-800-657-3970
www.health.state.mn.us/immunize

Meningococcal Vaccine: Why Preteens and Teens Should Get It – page 2

Who should get the meningococcal vaccine?

Several national groups, including the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommend that all children ages 11 to 12 years receive meningococcal vaccine as part of their preteen healthcare visit. Catch-up vaccination is also recommended for all adolescents ages 13 through 18 years.

What are the risks from meningococcal vaccine?

Most people have mild side effects from the vaccine, such as redness or pain where the shot was given. Rarely, serious allergic reactions occur within a few minutes to a few hours of the shot.

A serious nervous system disorder called Guillain-Barré Syndrome (or GBS) has been reported among some people who received the MCV4 vaccine. 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. If you are concerned, talk with your healthcare provider.

Can I get a free or low cost meningococcal shot?

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

- Talk to your doctor or clinic. If the person in need of vaccination is 18 years old or younger, they may be eligible for the Minnesota Vaccines for Children program. This program covers the cost of the vaccine; however, the parent may have to pay an administration fee of up to \$14.69 per shot.
- Talk to your city or county health department. They may be able to provide a low cost meningococcal shot.

How can I learn more?

Ask your doctor or clinic, or call your local health department's immunization program or the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636. Or visit these websites:

- Minnesota Department of Health
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/meningococcal/index.html
- CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/default.htm
- Immunization Action Coalition
www.immunize.org/vis/vis_menin.asp
- National Meningitis Association
www.nmaus.org