

Patient information from BMJ

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MenACWY vaccine

The MenACWY vaccine is a single injection that's designed to protect against four strains of meningococcal bacteria: types A, C, W, and Y.

Meningococcal bacteria can cause fatal infections including meningitis and sepsis.

What is meningococcal infection?

There are several types of meningococcal infection. The MenACWY vaccine protects against four of them: types A, C, W, AND Y.

Meningococcal infections are **extremely dangerous**.

They can cause serious, often fatal illnesses, including:

- **meningitis** and
- **sepsis** (a dangerously extreme reaction in the body to an infection).

The most well-known of these conditions among parents is probably meningitis. **Meningitis** is inflammation (swelling) of the tissues that protect the brain and spinal cord. These tissues are called the meninges.

This type of infection is not always caused by bacteria. Meningitis can also be caused by infection with a virus or, rarely, a fungus. But these types of infection are usually less serious.

Meningitis can sometimes be fatal. And people who recover are often affected for the rest of their lives. Long-term problems caused by meningitis can include:

- severe brain damage
- hearing or vision problems
- epilepsy
- problems with memory and concentration
- problems with movement and balance, and
- needing to have limbs amputated.

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To learn more about meningitis, and about what symptoms to look out for, see our leaflet: *Meningitis and septicaemia*.

Who needs the MenACWY vaccine?

Teenagers

In many countries, including the UK, vaccinations against various types of meningococcal disease start when people are babies.

For example, in the UK, by the age of 12 months, babies should have had three doses of meningococcal group B vaccine, and one dose of group C vaccine.

The MenACWY vaccine is usually offered to older children, at the age of about **14 years**, as part of vaccination programmes in schools.

Young adults

But the MenACWY vaccine hasn't been in use as long as some more established vaccines, such as the polio vaccine. So it's possible that some young people might have missed having the vaccine at school.

This means that, depending on where you live, you might be offered the vaccine later in your school career. You can still have the MenACWY vaccine **up to the age of 25 years old**.

In some countries it's recommended that young people about to start **higher education (for example, university)** should check if they have had the MenACWY vaccine.

Vaccinating new university students is important, because starting at university often involves mixing closely with a lot of people, some of whom might be carrying meningococcal bacteria without knowing it.

If you're about to start higher education, check if you need to have the MenACWY vaccine.

Other groups

The MenACWY vaccine might be recommended for other reasons, such as making the Hajj or Umrah pilgrimage, or visiting countries where there is a high risk of meningococcal disease.

In these situations, you might need a booster if it is more than five years since your last vaccination.

Is there anyone who shouldn't have the vaccine?

You shouldn't have the MenACWY vaccine if you:

- have had an allergic reaction to a previous dose of a meningitis vaccine, or
- are allergic to any of its ingredients. Tell the medical staff giving the vaccine about any allergies you have.

MenACWY vaccine

You should also check with the medical staff before having the vaccination if you:

- have haemophilia, or other health problems linked to bleeding or easy bruising
- have a fever. You will probably be advised to arrange to have the vaccine once your fever has cleared up
- are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Is it safe?

Like all vaccines, the MenACWY vaccine can cause side effects in some people. These are usually mild and rarely last longer than a day or two. These include:

- redness and itching where the injection was given (called the injection site). Some people get a small lump that can last for several days or weeks
- fatigue
- fever
- headache, and
- nausea.

How is the vaccination given?

MenACWY is given as a single injection into the upper arm.

How well does the vaccine work?

The vaccine gives very good protection against the four strains of meningitis that it is designed to protect against.

For example, in countries with good vaccination programmes, meningitis is now extremely rare.

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