

## **PATIENT INFORMATION**

### **Meningococcal Vaccines**

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### **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by a bacteria. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 -18 years old in the United States.

Meningitis is an infection of fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections, which are also devastating and always associated with a botchy purple rash.

About 2,600 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. 10-15% of these people die, in spite of treatment with antibiotics. Of those who live, another 11-19% lose their arms or legs, become deaf, have problems with their nervous systems, become 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. College freshmen who live in dormitories have an increased risk of getting a meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal infections can be treated with drugs such as penicillin. Still, about 1 out of every 10 people would get the disease dies from it, and many others are affected for life. That is why preventing the disease through the use of meningococcal vaccine is important for people at highest risk.

### **Meningococcal vaccine.**

Two meningococcal vaccines are available in the U.S.:

- Meningococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine, (MPSV4) has been available since the 1970s.
- Meningococcal Conjugate Vaccine, (MCV4) was licensed in 2005, known as Menactra.

Both vaccines can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the United States, and a type that cause epidemic's in Africa. Meningococcal vaccines cannot prevent to all types of the disease. But they do protect many people who might become sick if they didn't get the vaccine.

Both vaccines work well, and protect about 90% of those who get it. MCV4 is expected to give better, longer-lasting protection.

MCV4 should also be better at preventing the disease from spreading from person to person.

### **Who should get meningococcal vaccine, and when?**

MCV4 is recommended for all children at their routine preadolescent visit (11-12 years of age). We are making the vaccine available to all teens seen in our office.

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.
- US military recruits.
- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common, such as parts of Africa.
- People who might have been exposed during an outbreak.

MCV4 is the preferred vaccine for people 11-55 years of age. In these risk groups, but MPSV4 can be used if MCV4 is not available. MPSV4 should be used for children 2-10 years old, and adults over 55, who are at risk.

### **How many doses?**

People 2 years of age and older should get one dose.

MPSV4 may be recommended for children three months to two years of age under special circumstances. These children should get 2 doses, three months apart.

Some people 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 a 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 doctor if you have any severe allergies.
- People with a mild illness can usually get the vaccine.
- Meningococcal vaccines may be given to pregnant women.
- Meningococcal vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

### **What are the risks from meningococcal vaccines?**

#### ***Mild problems.***

Up to about half of people who get meningococcal vaccines have mild side effects, such as redness or pain or the shot was given.

If these problems occur, they usually last for one to two days. They are more common after MCV4 than after MPSV4.

A small percentage of people who receive the vaccine developed a fever.

#### ***Severe problems.***

Serious allergic reactions, within a few minutes to a few hours of the shot, are very rare.

### **What if there is a moderate or severe reaction?**

What should I 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 vaccine 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.org](http://www.vaers.org), or by calling 1-800-822-7967. VAERS does not provide medical advice.

### **How can I learn more?**

Contact The Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):  
call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-cdc-info)