

Meningococcal ACWY school vaccination program

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal bacteria are carried in the nose and throat of healthy individuals and are spread through prolonged household or intimate contact, for example kissing. Meningococcal disease is caused by multiple strains of meningococcal bacteria. This programme addresses the A, C, W and Y strains.

Meningococcal disease is a rare but severe infection that occurs when meningococcal bacteria invade the body from the throat or nose and enters the bloodstream.

Symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck or sore muscles, sometimes followed by a red or purple rash. The disease can progress very quickly and can lead to death or permanent disability.

Who is eligible for the free meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine provides protection against A, C, W, and Y strains and is administered as a single dose.

The vaccine is free to students in year 10 through a school-based vaccination

program. There will also be a free catch-up program available to all people aged between 16 and 19 years through their GP in the first year of the program, beginning in February 2018. While the vaccine is provided free by the ACT Government, the doctor may charge a consultation fee.

Why is ACT offering this program?

Although uncommon, meningococcal disease can become life-threatening very quickly.

Since 2014 meningococcal W and meningococcal Y cases have increased in number across Australia. Meningococcal W disease is associated with a higher chance of dying compared with disease from other strains circulating in Australia.

Young people are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the bacteria to others.

The vaccination program aims to protect young people and reduce risks for the community as a whole by decreasing the number of people carrying the bacteria in their nose and throat.

Why is the vaccine free for young people?

Older teenagers and young adults are at increased risk of meningococcal disease, more likely to carry the bacteria in their nose and throat, and more likely to spread the bacteria to others. This is due to social behaviours that result in the bacteria being transmitted through close physical contact, such as frequent kissing, nightclub attendance, living in residential colleges, and participating in other social activities that involve physical closeness.

What if my child has previously had Meningococcal C vaccine?

The free meningococcal ACWY vaccine will safely boost the young persons' protection against the C strain they had as a baby and will also protect against A, W and Y strains.

Can I get younger members of my family vaccinated through this program?

No. The meningococcal ACWY vaccination program is for older adolescents. If you would like to have younger members of your family vaccinated you will need to buy the vaccine with a doctor's prescription and get your doctor to give the vaccine.

Is the vaccine effective and safe?

Yes, studies have shown that the effectiveness of the meningococcal ACWY vaccine is between 80 and 85 percent in young people. It does not contain any live

bacteria and cannot cause meningococcal disease. Most side effects to the vaccine are minor and quickly disappear.

What are the vaccine side effects?

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a chance of common adverse reactions. These are usually mild and go away by themselves. Serious reactions are also possible, but are rare. There is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death. You cannot get meningococcal infection from the vaccine.

Common side effects from the vaccine include pain, redness and swelling at the injections site, fever, irritability, drowsiness, decreased appetite, headaches, rash and nausea. Serious general adverse events are rare. The safety of vaccines once they are in use are monitored.

For more information, visit:

<http://www.health.act.gov.au/our-services/immunisation/high-school-immunisation-program>