

Patient information from BMJ

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MenACWY vaccine

The MenACWY vaccine is a single shot 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 septicemia*.

Who needs the MenACWY vaccine?

Older children and teenagers

In the US, the MenACWY vaccine is mainly recommended for all 11 to 12 year old children, with a booster dose at 16 years old.

Other groups

This vaccine is also recommended for other groups of people who might be at risk of meningococcal disease. These include:

- young people about to start college who will be living in residential housing, and who have not previously had the vaccine.

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

- military recruits
- people traveling to countries where there is a high risk of meningococcal disease. This includes people making the Hajj pilgrimage, or to countries in the African “meningitis belt”. For more information, see CDC travel advice ([cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel))
- young children with certain health conditions, such as sickle cell disease or HIV.

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.

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

- have hemophilia, 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

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- 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 programs, meningitis is now extremely rare.

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