

MenACWY – An overview

What is Meningococcal disease?

- Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, also known as the meningococcus.
- The disease results in meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning).
- There are five main groups of this bacteria that commonly cause disease in the UK - groups A, B, C, W and Y.

How does it spread?

- The bacteria are spread through direct and prolonged contact such as kissing an infected person or by inhaling tiny droplets of contaminated saliva released when an infected person coughs or sneezes (droplet spread).
- Occasionally the bacteria defeat the body's defences and enter the bloodstream to cause septicaemia (blood poisoning). They can then go on to infect other parts of the body, including the meninges – important membranes around the brain and spinal cord– causing meningitis.

The symptoms

- Early symptoms of meningococcal disease can include severe headache, diarrhoea/vomiting, neck stiffness, severe muscle pain, fever, cold hands and feet, drowsiness and difficulty waking up.
- A recognisable symptom of septicaemia is a blotchy rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it. However, in some cases it may appear late or not at all. Do not wait for a rash to seek medical help.
- The recent meningitis W (MenW) strain has been particularly serious and can be difficult to diagnose because it has been associated with symptoms less frequently seen with meningococcal disease, such as severe diarrhoea and vomiting.

The risks

- Young adults and university students are at higher risk of infection because many of them mix closely with lots of new people, some of whom may unknowingly carry the meningococcal bacteria.
- Meningitis and septicaemia caused by the aggressive MenW strain previously caused a series of cases in young people.
- With early diagnosis and antibiotic treatment, most people with meningococcal disease make a full recovery. However, 1 in 3 teenagers infected with the highly virulent MenW strain have died.
- Those who recover can be left with serious long-term complications such as hearing loss, epilepsy, brain injury and amputation of limbs.

MenACWY Vaccine

Overview

- The MenACWY vaccination was introduced in 2015. The vaccine provides direct protection to those who are vaccinated and stops them carrying and spreading the bacteria to other people which will also provide indirect protection to unvaccinated children and adults.

Who is eligible?

- Children aged 13 to 14 (school year 9) are being offered the MenACWY vaccine in school as part of the routine adolescent schools programme, alongside the [3-in-1 teenage booster](#).
- Anyone born after 1 September 1996 who missed their routine MenACWY vaccination in school will remain eligible for the vaccine up to their 25th birthday and can be vaccinated at their GP.
- The MenACWY vaccine is offered to all eligible teenagers whether they choose to go get a job or an apprenticeship, join the armed forces or go on to higher education after leaving school. Whatever they do next, it is important that they've had the vaccine.
- Students going to university or college for the first time, including overseas and mature students, who have not yet had the MenACWY vaccine also remain eligible up to their 25th birthday.

Uptake

- Average Year 10 coverage for the MenACWY vaccine has increased year on year since it was introduced.
- Up to the end of August 2018 coverage was 85%, compared to 83% in 2016/17, and 77% in 2015/16.

Useful links

- For more information about the MenACWY vaccine visit [NHS online](#).
- The Meningitis Research Foundation has created a useful [eligibility checker](#) for the MenACWY vaccine.
- Visit gov.uk for the latest data on [laboratory confirmed](#) cases of meningococcal disease and the latest [MenACWY vaccine uptake](#) rates.