



Aged 24
or under?
Get the
meningitis C
message

mmunisation

the best way to protect your health

If you are 24 or under, you should now be immunised against one cause of meningitis, called meningococcal C infection, with the MenC vaccine.

Meningococcal infection can cause meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning). The MenC vaccine will protect you against one of the most common types, but will not protect against all types of the disease. So it's very important that you know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia (listed later in this leaflet).

The vaccine has already been offered to people who are under 20, with tremendous success. It is now available to everyone under 25. While the risk of the disease is generally low in adults, there is a greater risk for people aged between 20 and 24.

If you've had the new MenC vaccine before – either while you were still at school or when you started university or higher education – you will not need to have the vaccine again.

If you had a meningococcal vaccine before November 1999, talk to your GP about having the new vaccine.

If you've **not** had the vaccine and are 24 or under, talk to your practice nurse or GP **now**.

What are meningitis and septicaemia?

Meningitis is an inflammation (swelling) of the lining of the brain. It can be caused by a number of viruses or bacteria. Meningococcal group B and C are two types of bacteria that cause a high number of cases of meningitis in the UK. Group B is the most common, but group C causes more deaths.

These bacteria can also cause septicaemia (blood poisoning). In septicaemia, bacteria infect the blood and may spread through the body to make you very ill. Meningitis and septicaemia can kill.

The MenC vaccine only protects against group C meningitis and septicaemia. So far, scientists have not been able to develop a vaccine against group B that would protect against this type of disease in the UK.

How is the disease spread?

The bacteria can be spread from one person to another by coughing, sneezing or direct contact such as sharing a glass or kissing.

How serious are meningitis and septicaemia?

The diseases are quite rare but can be extremely dangerous, resulting in deafness, blindness, loss of arms or legs, and even death. However, if the symptoms are noticed and treatment (with antibiotics) is given quickly, people can recover fully.

You may be at greater risk if you smoke.

How common is the disease?

Nearly one in four young people naturally carries the bacteria in their mouth and throat without developing meningitis or septicaemia. But some can become very ill. We do not know why some people become ill and others carry the bug without harm.

What is the vaccine?

The vaccine protects you against group C meningitis and septicaemia. The vaccine is not live. It contains parts of the bacteria which should protect you but cannot give you the disease. You only need one dose, which is given in an injection.

How long will the vaccine protect me for?

One injection should protect you for the rest of your life. However, it doesn't protect you against all causes of meningitis and septicaemia, so do watch out for the signs and symptoms described in this leaflet.

Where should I go to be immunised?

You can arrange to be immunised at your GP's surgery. Contact the surgery if you've not had the vaccine.

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

The side effects of the vaccine are usually mild and do not last very long. About one to two days after the jab you may have a sore arm and some redness and swelling where the injection was given. This will usually go away within a few days. You may develop a slight temperature which lasts for a few hours, or you may get a headache.

Are there any reasons why I should not have this vaccine?

You should not have the vaccine if you are ill and have a temperature. If you've had a severe allergic reaction to a previous immunisation, you'll need to check with your doctor or nurse first. Tell your doctor or nurse if you think you might be pregnant.

Signs and symptoms of meningitis

The vaccine does not protect you against all causes of meningitis and septicaemia so it is very important that you are aware of all the signs and symptoms.

Signs and symptoms of meningitis

- being sick
- a fever
- pain in your back or joints
- a very bad headache, or
- a stiff neck.

Signs and symptoms of septicaemia

- can't stand bright lights
- become disorientated (dazed and confused)
- develop a rash which looks like a bruise and doesn't fade under pressure (do the glass test – see below), or
- start to lose consciousness.

Do the glass test – If you press the side of a glass firmly against the rash, it should fade and lose colour under the pressure. If it doesn't change colour, contact your doctor immediately.

If you are worried that you or someone you know might have meningitis or septicaemia, contact your GP or go to the nearest accident and emergency department **immediately**. A person who is diagnosed as having meningitis will be treated with antibiotics straight away, and will go into hospital.



www.immunisation.org.uk

