

Meningococcal ACWY Secondary School Vaccine Program in Victoria

Frequently Asked Questions

Why has the Victorian Government introduced this program?

In Victoria since 2014, there has been an increase in the number of cases of meningococcal disease due to serogroup W – a very infectious strain similar to those that have been circulating in the United Kingdom and Chile since 2009.

In September 2016, an expert immunisation group advised that a nationally coordinated immunisation program against meningococcal serogroup W disease in adolescents was warranted to prevent a further increase in disease.

In line with a decision by several other states to fund their own programs, the Minister for Health announced a Victorian Government response on 8 February 2017, in the form of a one-year free school-based meningococcal W vaccination program for adolescents in Years 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school.

Who is eligible for the free Meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

The vaccine is free for adolescents in Years 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school, as well as those adolescents not in secondary school but of an equivalent age (15-19 years) until 31 December 2017.

Why is the vaccine free for adolescents in Years 10, 11 and 12?

Adolescents in Years 10, 11 and 12 are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the disease to others. Immunising this age group will prevent spread to other age groups.

Where can adolescents get the vaccine?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine will be delivered to Years 10, 11 and 12 students at school.

Eligible adolescents not in secondary school, or whom are away on vaccination day, can attend either a local council community immunisation session, or their General Practitioner (GP) to receive the free Meningococcal ACWY vaccine. A consultation fee may be charged.

What is the Meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

The Meningococcal ACWY vaccine is a four-in-one combined vaccine for protection against meningococcal A, C, W and Y strains. These vaccines do not contain any live bacteria and cannot cause meningococcal disease.

Why should my child get the free Meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

Although uncommon, meningococcal disease can become life-threatening very quickly. If you are vaccinated, you protect yourself and others around you by reducing the spread of the disease.

Since 2014 the meningococcal W strain has increased across Australia, and it is now the predominant strain in Victoria. Adolescents are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the disease to others. Immunising this age group will prevent the spread of disease to other age groups.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria. Although uncommon, it can become very serious, very quickly. About 10 per cent of people carry meningococcal bacteria in their throat without becoming unwell. These people are known as 'carriers'. Meningococcal bacteria are passed from person to person by regular, close, prolonged household and intimate contact. Adolescents are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and are more likely to spread the disease to others. Invasive meningococcal disease occurs when these bacteria enter the blood stream to cause septicaemia (infection in the blood, also known as 'bacteraemia') or meningitis, (inflammation of the membrane covering of the brain). Death can occur in up to 10 per cent of cases. Occasionally, severe infection can also occur in the joints, throat, lungs or intestines.

Read about causes, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment on [the Meningococcal disease fact sheet](#) on the Better Health Channel.

Do adolescents need parent/guardian permission to get the vaccine?

Secondary Schools distribute Meningococcal ACWY Secondary School Vaccine Program consent cards to all students in Years 10, 11 and 12. Parents/guardians are required to complete and return the card, regardless of whether they consent for their child to be immunised.

Fifteen, 16 and 17 year olds routinely need parental consent for the local council school vaccine program. The GP should discuss informed consent with the young person in the community setting. Eighteen and 19 year olds can provide their own consent.

What other strains of meningococcal disease can you be vaccinated against?

Meningococcal vaccines are available to protect against five strains of meningococcal disease designated by letters of the alphabet A, B, C, W and Y.

The predominant strain circulating in the community may change over time. Disease due to strain C has decreased since the introduction of meningococcal C vaccine to the National Immunisation Program in 2003. Strain W is currently causing the most disease in Victoria.

Meningococcal C containing vaccine is available for free in Victoria as part of the National Immunisation Program schedule for:

- children at 12 months – immunisation against meningococcal serogroup C is given in combination with the booster dose of vaccine against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- children from 13 months up to and including nineteen years to catch-up
- Meningococcal B containing vaccine is available by prescription but is not available free under the National Immunisation Program schedule.

What if my child has previously had the Meningococcal C vaccine?

In addition to the W strain, the four-in-one vaccine will safely boost adolescents with the C strain they had as a baby and protect against the A, W and Y strains.

Is the vaccine safe and effective?

Yes, studies have shown that the effectiveness of the meningococcal ACWY vaccine is between 80 to 85 per cent in adolescents. Most side effects to the vaccine are minor and quickly disappear. If the following reactions occur, it will be soon after vaccination.

Common side effects:

- Mild temperature
- Headache
- Dizziness

- Pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- Fainting may occur up to 30 minutes after any vaccination.

If mild reactions do occur, the side effects can be reduced by:

- Drinking extra fluids and not over-dressing if the person has a fever
- Taking paracetamol and placing a cold, wet cloth on the sore injection site.

Extremely rare side effects:

- Severe allergic reaction.

In the event of a severe allergic reaction, immediate medical attention will be provided. If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your GP or hospital. Any unexpected or significant reactions should be reported to the Victorian vaccine safety service on 1300 882 924 (option 1).

Further information

betterhealth.vic.gov.au

immunehero.health.vic.gov.au