

Meningococcal disease is caused by the type of bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis* (also known as meningococcus). This bacteria can live in the nose and throat of healthy people without causing illness. Meningococcal infection doesn't spread very easily.

The bacteria can only be passed to others after a long period of close contact, for example with living with someone in shared accommodation, through prolonged kissing or sharing vapes.

While meningococcal disease can affect all ages, recent outbreaks have shown that older children, teenagers and young adults, particularly those in shared settings such as schools, colleges and universities, are more likely to be affected.

There are five main groups of meningococcal bacteria that can cause meningitis and septicaemia – A, B, C, W and Y.

In Northern Ireland, young babies receive the Men B vaccine as part of the childhood immunisation programme. The MenACWY vaccine helps protect young people against four different causes of meningitis and septicaemia: meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y disease. You only need one dose of the vaccine, it is given as a single injection in the upper arm. Pupils in year 11 are automatically offered the vaccine in school by the school health team, with a second chance to have it again in year 12, if they missed out the first time.

If you're aged 25 or under, at university for the first time and haven't yet had the MenACWY vaccination, you should ask your GP for the vaccine.

If your child has missed a vaccination, please contact your GP practice to book an appointment as soon as you can to make sure they have maximum protection against disease.

Types of Meningococcal disease

There are five main types (called serotypes) that can cause illness in people: A, B, C, W, and Y.

- Meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord)

- Septicaemia (blood poisoning)

These conditions are common in the winter months, and people at highest risk include young children and teenagers.

Protection and vaccination

A vaccine against Meningococcal B (MenB) is available. It also offers some protection against gonorrhoea.

- Read more in [a guide to the Meningococcal B vaccine for protection against gonorrhoea | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

Information for health professionals

- [Meningococcal: the green book, chapter 22 - GOV.UK](#)
- [Meningococcal ACWY programme for adolescents: factsheet for healthcare professionals](#)
- [Meningococcal B \(MenB\) immunisation programme - factsheet for healthcare professionals](#)
- [Most recent calendar year surveillance tables](#)
- [Most recent Epidemiological year surveillance tables](#)
- [Annual immunisation and vaccine preventable diseases reports](#)
- For detailed information on Meningococcal Disease in the UK, visit the [UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\) site](#).

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