

# Are you aged up to 25 years and starting university for the first time?

If yes, protect yourself against meningitis and septicaemia

Make sure you have had the MenACWY vaccination or get it before you start the academic year or soon after.



mmunisation

the safest way to protect your child

# Meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease is a rare but life-threatening disease caused by meningococcal bacteria which are divided into several groups. The most common are A, B, C, W and Y. Infants, young children, teenagers and young adults have the highest risk of meningococcal disease.

Recently, there has been a large increase in meningococcal group W (MenW) disease in the UK. Older teenagers and young adults are more at risk of getting meningitis and septicaemia from MenW.

This is why it's important that you have MenACWY vaccination to protect against meningococcal disease.

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal bacteria can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning). Both diseases are very serious and can kill, especially if not diagnosed early.



The early symptoms of meningococcal disease are similar to those of flu, so you need to be able to recognise the symptoms very quickly (even if you have been vaccinated against all forms of the disease).

A full description of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia can be found at [www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org) and [www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org) or see pages 9 and 10.

## **What causes meningococcal disease?**

There are five main groups of meningococcal bacteria that can cause meningitis and septicaemia – A, B, C, W and Y. The same bacteria that cause these serious diseases are also commonly carried in the back of the nose and throat, especially in young adults.

## **How common is it?**

Meningococcal group C disease is now rare since MenC vaccination was introduced to the national immunisation programme in 1999. MenB is now the most common cause of meningococcal disease in children and young adults, while MenW and MenY used to mainly cause serious illness in older adults. Recently, however, there was a large increase in MenW disease in the UK, resulting in several deaths among infants and teenagers.

## **Why do I need to get the vaccine?**

As a young adult mixing with a large number of new people at university, you are at higher risk of getting MenW disease, so you need to get vaccinated to protect yourself.

Vaccination also reduces the risk of you carrying the bacteria and so protects other people around you. It is still important to know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia (see pages 9 and 10) because there are many other bacteria that can also cause these illnesses, including the group B strain, which is not covered by this vaccination.

## **I'm an overseas student, do I still need to get vaccinated?**

Yes, both UK-born and overseas students entitled to NHS/HSC care should have the vaccination before they start university, or soon after. Make sure you register with a GP as soon as you arrive and arrange to have the vaccine.



## What do I need to do if I'm planning to go to university this autumn?

New university students are at particularly high risk in the first weeks of term when they will come into contact with many new people of a similar age. Therefore, if you are aged up to 25 years and are starting university for the first time, **we recommend you get the vaccine from your GP before you go to university if you have not already had it at school or at your GP.** You should always register with a GP in the area when you start university and you can arrange to get the vaccine there if you have not had the vaccine before you get to university.

You should do that straight away, ideally in your first week of term. Don't leave it until later.



## **I recently had the MenC vaccine, do I need to have the MenACWY vaccine as well?**

Yes, even if you recently had the MenC vaccine, for example in school, you should still get the MenACWY vaccine when it is offered to you. The MenACWY vaccine will increase your protection against MenC and help to protect you against three other meningococcal groups (A, W and Y).

## **What if I have already received the MenACWY vaccine?**

The MenACWY vaccine has been offered in schools and by GPs since 2015, when the programme first started. You only need to have the MenACWY vaccine once. If you have already received the MenACWY conjugate vaccine in school or from your GP at the age of 14 years or over you do not require an additional dose of the vaccine.

## **I have been to university before, do I need the vaccine?**

People who are starting university for the first time are at greater risk of meningococcal disease because they are mixing and living in close contact with many new people of a similar age for the first time. If you have already been to university before, you are not at the same risk and so are not recommended to have the vaccine.

## **Is the vaccine safe?**

The vaccine has been used for many years across the world and has an excellent safety record. Serious side effects from the vaccine are rare.

## Are there any reasons why I should not be immunised?

There are very few reasons why you should not be immunised. You should let your GP or nurse know if you:

- have a very high temperature or fever;
- have had a bad reaction to any immunisation;
- have had a severe allergy to anything;
- have had a bleeding disorder;
- are pregnant.

These don't always mean that you can't be immunised but it helps the doctor or nurse decide which are the best immunisations for you and whether they need to give you any other advice. A family history of illness is never a reason not to be vaccinated.

## Does the vaccination hurt? What are the common side effects?

It's like a sting. You may get soreness and some redness and swelling in your arm after the injection - you may also get a headache, but these symptoms should disappear after one or two days. If you feel unwell after the immunisation, you can take paracetamol. Read the instructions on the packet carefully and take the correct dose for your age. If necessary, take a second dose four to six hours later. If your temperature is still high after the second dose, speak to your GP.

***Remember, if you are under 16 you should not take medicines that contain aspirin.***

## Do I have to have it?

All vaccinations in the UK are voluntary but it's recommended that everybody aged up to 25 years and starting university for the first time this year has the MenACWY vaccine to help protect themselves and others, such as young infants, who may be particularly susceptible to meningococcal disease. You have to consent to have the vaccine.

## What if I want more information before consenting?

If you feel you need more information about any aspect of vaccination you can always speak to the nurse or GP. You can visit [www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations) or contact the meningitis charities listed at the end of this leaflet.

**Meningitis and septicaemia are very serious and require urgent attention. If you think you've got either, get help immediately and make sure your fellow students know to look out for you and each other.**





# Look out for any of these symptoms

- Fever, cold hands and feet
- Vomiting and diarrhoea
- Drowsiness, difficult to wake up
- Irritability and/or confusion
- Dislike of bright lights
- Severe headache or muscle pains
- Pale, blotchy skin with or without a rash
- Convulsions/seizures
- Stiff neck

## Do the glass test

Someone with septicaemia may develop a few spots or a widespread rash with fever. Later on the rash can develop into purple blotches that do not fade under pressure. You can do a test for this by pressing the side of a glass tumbler against the rash. If you have a fever and a rash, and the **rash does not fade under pressure**, get medical help immediately by calling 999 or getting someone to take you to the nearest hospital emergency department. Never wait for a rash, though. It can be a late sign or may not appear at all. If someone is ill and getting worse get medical help immediately.



## How can I find out more?

There is more information about the MenACWY vaccination on [www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations) or you can talk to your GP, nurse or university health centre if you have any questions.

The following charities also provide information, advice and support:

### **Meningitis Now**

Free helpline (9am-5pm Monday-Friday)

0808 80 10 388

[www.meningitisnow.org](http://www.meningitisnow.org)

### **Meningitis Research Foundation**

Free helpline (9am-5pm Monday-Friday)

080 8800 3344

[www.meningitis.org](http://www.meningitis.org)



If you would like further information about immunisation, visit  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net) or [www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations)

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