

VOICES OF MENINGITIS™

A Meningococcal Disease Prevention Campaign
from the National Association of School Nurses

In collaboration with sanofi pasteur

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Meningococcal Disease

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial infection that can cause meningitis (swelling of the brain or spinal cord) or meningococemia (blood infection).

How serious is meningococcal meningitis?

Although rare, meningitis is a serious disease that can kill or disable an otherwise healthy young person in just a single day. About 10 percent of people who get meningococcal disease will die. Of those who survive, 1 in 5 is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of arms, legs, fingers, and toes; brain damage; deafness; and organ damage.

How common is meningococcal meningitis?

Meningococcal disease is rare — about 1000 to 2600 people in the United States get the disease each year. But given the devastating nature of meningococcal disease, prevention is very important. Vaccination is the best way to help prevent meningitis.

How do you get meningococcal meningitis?

Meningococcal bacteria are spread from person to person through close contact. Common everyday activities (eg, sharing drinking glasses, kissing, or living in close quarters) can put even healthy preteens and teens at greater risk for getting meningitis. That's why vaccination is so important.

What is the difference between viral and bacterial meningitis?

Meningitis is a potentially life threatening disease that is caused by a viral or bacterial infection.

Viral meningitis is generally less severe and can clear up without specific treatment.

Bacterial meningitis, on the other hand, requires prompt treatment with antibiotics and, even with treatment, brain damage, hearing loss, and learning disability may result.

There are also different types of bacterial meningitis, caused by different bacteria, including:

- *Neisseria meningitidis*
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (*Hib*)
- *Streptococcus pneumoniae*

In the United States almost all cases are caused by five strains of the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium, four of which are vaccine-preventable.

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Can both viral and bacterial meningitis be prevented by vaccination?

There are no vaccines against the most common causes of viral meningitis in the United States. However, some diseases that can lead to viral meningitis, like measles, mumps, chickenpox and influenza, can be prevented by vaccination.

Vaccination is available to help protect against the three types of bacterial meningitis: *Neisseria meningitidis*, *Hib* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. *Hib* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae* vaccines are routinely given during infancy. Vaccination against four strains of *Neisseria meningitidis* is recommended for preteens and teens.

Who is recommended to get vaccinated against meningococcal meningitis?

Vaccination is safe and effective and the best way to help protect preteens and teens from meningococcal meningitis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal vaccination for preteens and teens beginning at age 11, with a booster dose by 18 years of age. Vaccination is also available to those 9 months to 55 years of age who wish to reduce their risk of meningococcal disease.

Is the meningococcal meningitis vaccine safe? What are the side effects?

Vaccination has been available for years and is a safe and effective way to help protect against meningococcal disease.

Some people experience mild side effects from the vaccination, such as temporary injection site pain, redness, swelling, headache, and tiredness.

Is the meningococcal meningitis vaccine covered by insurance?

Yes, the cost of the vaccine is covered by most health insurance plans.

Can parents get their children vaccinated if they don't have health insurance?

Yes, eligible families—including those without health insurance or those who are underinsured—can have their children 18 years of age and younger vaccinated for free or at low cost through the federal Vaccines for Children Program. Talk to your child's health-care provider or local public health department to ask about how to get vaccinated through the Vaccines for Children Program.

Are children and teens required to receive the meningococcal meningitis vaccine?

Each state has its own vaccination requirements for school entry. To learn more about the vaccination requirements in your state, contact your local public health department or speak with your child's health-care provider or school nurse.

Why do some states not require meningococcal vaccination for children and teens?

Mandates for meningococcal vaccination and/or education about meningococcal disease are established at the state level, based on recommendations by state public health officials. These mandates often change, so you should contact your local public health department or speak with your child's health-care provider or school nurse to learn more about the vaccination requirements in your state.

Where can parents take their children to get the vaccine?

Parents can get their preteens and teens vaccinated at their health-care provider or local public health clinic.

