

# Free Meningococcal Vaccine for young people in Years 10, 11 & 12

Information for young people and parents/guardians

To combat a recent rise in cases of Meningococcal W disease, the Victorian Government has introduced a free, time-limited vaccine program for young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 in Victoria from 18 April 2017 until 31 December 2017.

Young people receiving the vaccine will be protected against the 'W' strain of the disease, as well as three other strains ('A', 'C' and 'Y').

## Who is eligible for the free Meningococcal vaccine?

The vaccine is free to young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school, as well as those young people not in secondary school but of an equivalent age (aged 15-19 years between 18 April 2017 and 31 December 2017).

## Why get the free Meningococcal vaccine?

Although uncommon, meningococcal disease can become life-threatening very quickly.

Since 2014 the meningococcal W strain has increased across Australia, and it is now the predominant strain in Victoria.

If you are vaccinated, you protect yourself and others around you by reducing the spread of the disease.

The vaccine is safe and effective and free to eligible young people for a limited time.

## Where can young people get the free vaccine?

Most young people will receive the vaccine at secondary school.

**Step 1:** The school gives parent/guardian consent cards to all students in Years 10, 11 and 12.

**Step 2:** Students give the card to parents/guardians, who must complete the card and make sure it is returned to the school. (Even if the parent/guardian does not consent, the complete card must be returned.)

**Step 3:** Nurse immunisers from local councils give the vaccine to students who have provided written consent at schools on a day(s) agreed to by the secondary school. Students are given a record of the vaccine.

## What if the young person is not at school?

Eligible young people not in secondary school (either away on the day the vaccine was given or do not attend secondary school) can attend either a local council community immunisation session, or a General Practitioner (GP) to receive the free Meningococcal ACWY vaccine. A consultation fee may be charged by the GP. Contact your local council to find out when and where immunisation sessions are held.

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal bacteria live in the back of the nose and throat of about 10 per cent of people without causing illness.

Meningococcal disease is caused when a particular strain gets through the lining of the throat and enters a person's bloodstream.

Symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, stiff neck or sore muscles, sometimes followed by a red or purple rash.

The bacteria can only survive outside the body for a few seconds and can only be passed from person to person by close and prolonged household or intimate contact, for example deep kissing.

The disease can progress very quickly and can lead to death or permanent disability. Up to 10 per cent of infected people die, even if they are treated with the right antibiotics.

Young people are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the disease to others.

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

## What strains of meningococcal disease can you be immunised against?

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

The free vaccine for young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 protects against A, C, W and Y strains.

Children aged 12 months old are vaccinated for free against the C strain as part of the National Immunisation Program schedule.

A vaccine against the B strain is available by prescription from a GP but is not usually free.

Anyone wishing to be immunised against any or all of the strains can discuss this with their GP. GPs can provide vaccine prescriptions and patients can purchase the prescribed vaccine/s.

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

The free Meningococcal ACWY vaccine will safely boost the young persons' protection against the C strain they had as a baby and will also protect against the A, W and Y strains.

## Why is the vaccine free for young people in Years 10, 11 and 12?

Young people in this age group are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the disease to others. Immunisation experts have advised that immunising this age group can prevent spread to other age groups.

## Do young people need parent/guardian permission to get the vaccine?

- Fifteen, 16 and 17 year olds need consent from a parent or guardian to receive the vaccine.
- Eighteen and 19 year olds can provide their own consent.

Young people aged under 18 who are eligible for the free vaccine but who have an issue getting parental consent can talk to their GP about their options.

## Why has the Victorian Government introduced this program?

The most common strain (either A, B, C, W, Y) of meningococcal disease circulating in the community changes over time.

Since 2014, there has been an increase in the number of cases of type W meningococcal disease – 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 W disease in young people was needed 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 young people in Years 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school.

## 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 young people. It does not contain any live bacteria and cannot cause meningococcal disease. Most side effects to the vaccine are minor and quickly disappear. Read about side effects and their treatment on the [Meningococcal disease – immunisation fact sheet](#) on the Better Health Channel.

## Where can I get more information?

Parents/guardians and young people can access more information by searching 'meningococcal' at [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

If you have a health concern speak with your doctor or call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.