

**A**s a parent, you do everything you can to protect your children's health now and for the future. Meningococcal disease can become very serious, very quickly. Meningococcal vaccines are the best way to help protect teens from getting meningococcal disease.

## Meningococcal disease

Meningococcal disease refers to any illness that is caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. The two most severe and common illnesses caused by these bacteria include infections of the fluid and lining around the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and bloodstream infections (bacteremia or septicemia).

Even if they get treatment, about 10 to 15 out of 100 people with meningococcal disease will die from it. About 11 to 19 out of every 100 survivors will have long-term disabilities, such as loss of limb(s), deafness, nervous system problems, or brain damage.

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease spread from person to person when people have close or lengthy contact with someone's saliva, like through kissing or coughing. Teens and young adults are at increased risk for meningococcal disease. Living in close quarters, like in the same household, a dorm, or military barrack, can also increase the risk of getting some types of meningococcal disease.

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## The vaccines that protect against it

Meningococcal disease is not very common in the United States, but can be devastating and often—and unexpectedly—strikes otherwise healthy people. Vaccination is the best way to help protect teens from getting meningococcal disease. There are two types of meningococcal vaccines, the quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate and the

serogroup B meningococcal vaccine. The quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine helps protect against 4 strains (serogroups A, C, W, and Y) of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Serogroup B meningococcal vaccine helps protect against one strain (serogroup B) of the bacteria. There is not a meningococcal vaccine that offers protection against all common serogroups in one shot, however both vaccines can be given during the same visit, preferably in different arms.

## More about meningitis

When someone has meningococcal meningitis, the protective membranes covering their brain and spinal cord, known as the meninges, become infected and swell. The symptoms of meningitis include sudden onset of fever, headache, and stiff neck. There are often additional symptoms, such as

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Photophobia (increased sensitivity to light)
- Altered mental status (confusion)

The symptoms of meningococcal meningitis can appear quickly or over several days. Typically they develop within 3 to 7 days after exposure. If you think your child has any of these symptoms, call the doctor right away.



## When does my child need the vaccine?

Meningococcal vaccination is recommended for all preteens and teens. All 11 to 12 year olds should be vaccinated with a single dose of a quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine. Since protection decreases over time, a booster dose is recommended at age 16 so teens continue to have protection during the ages when they are at highest risk of meningococcal disease. Teens and young adults (16 through 23 year olds) may also be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine (2 or 3 doses depending on brand), preferably at 16 through 18 years old. Talk with your teen's doctor or nurse about meningococcal vaccination to help protect your child's health. If your older teen has not received their quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine, you should talk to their doctor or nurse about getting it as soon as possible.

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## More about septicemia

When someone has meningococcal septicemia, the bacteria enter the bloodstream and multiply, damaging the walls of the blood vessels and causing bleeding into the skin and organs. Symptoms of septicemia may include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Cold hands and feet
- Cold chills
- Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest, or abdomen (belly)
- Rapid breathing
- Diarrhea
- In the later stages, a dark purple rash

If you think your child has any of these symptoms, call the doctor right away.

## What else should I know about these vaccines?

Like many vaccines, meningococcal shots may cause mild side effects, like redness and soreness where the shot was given (usually in the arm). Note that both meningococcal vaccines can be given during the same visit, but in different arms. Some preteens and teens might faint after getting a meningococcal vaccine or any shot. To help avoid fainting, preteens and teens should sit or lie down when they get a shot and then for about 15 minutes after getting the shot. Meningococcal vaccines can also safely be given at the same time as the other recommended vaccines, including the HPV, Tdap, and influenza vaccines. Learn more about all of the recommended preteen vaccines at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens).

## Help paying for vaccines

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger who are uninsured, Medicaid-eligible, or American Indian/Alaska Native. Learn more about the VFC program at [www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/).

Whether you have insurance, or your child is VFC-eligible, some doctors' offices may also charge a fee to give the vaccines.

## Kayla's story: "Twelve hours later, I was fighting for my life."

It was in the spring of 2000 when meningococcal disease forever altered the course of my life. One day in elementary school, I began feeling sick and went to see the school nurse. Suspecting it was the flu, the nurse sent me home to rest.

Twelve hours later, I was fighting for my life.

I woke up at 3 a.m. covered in a blotchy, purple rash and had difficulty walking. Panicked and desperate, I crawled to my parents' room, so they could rush me to a hospital.

The doctors told my parents that I had meningococcal disease and that I only had a 10 percent chance of survival.

Ultimately, I spent a total of 11 months in the hospital receiving various surgeries, going through rehabilitation, and learning how to walk again. I don't go a single day

without feeling the effects of this disease. I lost my legs below the knee, some of my fingers, and function in my kidneys. The disease moves so fast and can be deadly if not caught in time.

When the doctors told me and my parents I had meningococcal disease, we had never heard of it nor that there was a vaccine that could have prevented it.

Shortly after I got meningococcal disease, four girls in my city contracted the disease. Public health officials were able to trace the cases back to an outing that we all attended with our local girls club.

It's a very real disease with very real symptoms. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against this serious disease. All preteens need the meningococcal vaccine to be protected from meningitis and septicemia.

## Helpful Terms

**Bacteremia:** A bloodstream infection

**Meningitis:** An infection of the areas around the brain and spinal cord that can be caused by many things

***Neisseria meningitidis*:** The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease

**Quadrivalent:** Protects against 4 serogroups; for meningococcal disease those serogroups are A, C, W, and Y

**Septicemia:** A serious bloodstream infection; blood poisoning

**Serogroup:** A group of bacteria that are closely related; there are five serogroups of *Neisseria meningitidis* that cause most meningococcal disease in the world — A, B, C, W, and Y

For more information about the vaccines recommended for preteens and teens:

**800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)**

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens)