

Meningococcal ACWY program

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but severe infection that occurs when meningococcal bacteria invade the body from the throat or nose.

Meningococcal bacteria are carried in the nose and throat of healthy individuals and are spread through close prolonged contact. The bacteria are more commonly found in teenagers and young adults. There are a number of different strains of meningococcal bacteria. Worldwide, the main strains that cause meningococcal disease are A, B, C, W and Y.

Most people with meningococcal infection fully recover, but some people who survive can develop long-term health complications including limb deformity, skin scarring, deafness and possible loss of brain function. Meningococcal W disease has a higher death rate than meningococcal C and meningococcal B infections and may be fatal in about 1 in 10 cases.

Why is Queensland Health offering this program?

During 2016 in Australia, there was a substantial rise in the number of meningococcal W cases, with more cases of this strain reported than meningococcal B cases.

In Queensland during 2016, there was a rise in the numbers of meningococcal W cases, and also meningococcal Y cases. The total number of notifications of meningococcal disease in Queensland in 2016 was 45. Of these, 17 were meningococcal B, 13 meningococcal W and 13 meningococcal Y.

As there is a safe and effective vaccine that covers strains A, C, W and Y, the Meningococcal ACWY program is being introduced. It is designed to protect young people and also reduce risks for the community as a whole by decreasing the proportion of people carrying the bacteria in their nose and throat.

What is the Meningococcal ACWY program?

The Queensland Government is offering free meningococcal ACWY vaccination to all Year 10 students through the School Immunisation Program and is also offering free vaccine for young people aged 15 to 19 years of age through their doctor or immunisation provider. While the vaccine is provided free by the Queensland Government, the doctor may charge a consultation fee.

Why is this program targeting 15 to 19 year olds?

Some of the highest rates of meningococcal carriage occur among 15 to 19 year olds and this age group can transmit the meningococcal bacteria to people who are at increased risk of infection, including young children.

The reason we are vaccinating 15 to 19 year olds is to reduce the risk of meningococcal disease caused by strains A, C, W and Y in this age group, and to reduce the spread of meningococcal disease caused by these strains. Vaccinating this group will protect individuals immediately and the wider community over time.

What if my child has already been vaccinated against meningococcal C?

Vaccination against meningococcal C has been included in the National Immunisation Program Schedule since 1 January 2003. From 2003 to June 2008, meningococcal C vaccine was provided in a catch-up program for all children aged 1 to 19 years. This means that many children in the target group for the Meningococcal ACWY program will have received meningococcal C vaccine.

Previous vaccination with the meningococcal C vaccine is no barrier to having the meningococcal ACWY vaccine. The vaccine being used in the Meningococcal ACWY program provides protection against meningococcal strains A, C W and Y. It is important that individuals are vaccinated with meningococcal ACWY to protect them against the extra strains.

Where can 15 to 19 year olds get the vaccine?

15 to 19 year olds will be able to get the meningococcal ACWY vaccine either through the School Immunisation Program if they are in Year 10, or from their usual immunisation provider, such as their GP. The vaccine is free, however the doctor may charge a consultation fee.

When will the program start?

The school immunisation program will commence in some schools in school term 2, 2017 with progressive implementation throughout the 2017 school year. GPs and other immunisation providers will have vaccines available from June.

Who will be eligible?

Individuals in either of the following two groups are eligible:

- Students in Year 10 in 2017
- Young people aged 15 to 19 years at time of vaccination.

When will clinics be held at my child's school?

The date and time of school vaccination clinics are currently being determined by your child's school and Queensland Health's approved school immunisation provider.

If your child is in Year 10, they will soon receive a consent pack for the Meningococcal ACWY program. If you would like your child to receive meningococcal ACWY vaccine, please sign and return the consent card to your child's school.

When will the vaccine be available at my GP and/or other community immunisation provider?

Immunisation providers will have supply of the vaccine commencing in June. Parents and young adults may wish to ring their immunisation provider to check they have the meningococcal ACWY vaccine in stock before making an appointment.

How long will the program run for?

The Meningococcal ACWY program for Year 10 students as part of the School Immunisation Program will run in schools during the 2017 school year. Free meningococcal ACWY vaccine will also be available from GPs and other immunisation providers from June 2017 until the end of May 2018.

Which vaccine is being used?

The Meningococcal ACWY program will be using Menveo[®] and Menactra[®] vaccines.

There are three brands of vaccine which protect against meningococcal ACWY registered for use in Australia and all have been shown to be effective. There is no single vaccine which gives protection against all strains of meningococcal disease.

Is the meningococcal ACWY vaccine safe?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine is safe and effective. Meningococcal ACWY vaccination programs targeting adolescents have been effectively implemented in the UK since 2015 and in the US since 2005. Serious side effects from the vaccine are extremely rare. Minor side effects that may be experienced include tenderness, redness or swelling at the site of injection and, low grade fever.

Can I get younger members of my family vaccinated through this program?

No. The Meningococcal ACWY program is for 15 to 19 year olds. If you would like to have younger members of your family vaccinated you will need to buy the vaccine with a doctor's prescription and get your doctor to give the vaccine.

Can I get a reimbursement from the government if my 15 to 19 year old has previously received a vaccine that I paid for?

No. If you paid to have a 15 to 19 year old vaccinated before the program started, you cannot be reimbursed by the government for this cost.

Where can I get more information about meningococcal disease?

- Visit the Queensland Health website at <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/33/95/meningococcal-disease>
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- Make an appointment with your doctor