

Meningococcal B Vaccine (Bexsero[®]): Information for high risk individuals & caregivers

This fact sheet provides basic information for the public. It is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you may have, before you make any changes to your current diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Effective December 2014, Ontario has introduced the multicomponent meningococcal B vaccine (4CMenB or Bexsero[®]) as part of its publicly funded high risk meningococcal immunization program for individuals 2 months to 17 years of age with specific high risk conditions.

What is invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)?

IMD is caused by bacteria known as *Neisseria meningitidis*. Among the different strains of meningococcal bacteria, five (A, B, C, Y and W-135) cause the majority of cases of meningococcal disease. Many people (10% of the population) carry the bacteria at the back of their throat or nose without feeling sick. In rare instances, the bacteria overcome the body's natural defenses and cause serious diseases, including meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) and septicemia (widespread infection involving the blood and multiple organs). Meningococcal disease is fatal in 8-15% of cases and 11 to 19% of survivors will suffer some form of permanent disability, such as hearing loss, brain (neurological) damage or limb loss.

Within Canada, incidence of disease varies by age; however, infants under one year of age are at highest risk of IMD caused by serogroup B disease.

The symptoms of meningococcal disease can vary widely, but can include sudden onset of high fever, severe headache, vomiting, stiff neck and a rash. Sensitivity to light, sleepiness, confusion and, in severe cases, coma may also occur. As noted above, the consequences of meningococcal meningitis can be severe.

How do you get IMD?

Meningococcus bacteria are spread by direct contact with respiratory and oral secretions (saliva, and/or nasal mucus) or, in other words, contact with saliva (or spit) with an infected person. To prevent the spread of meningococcal disease, objects that have come in contact with another person's mouth should not be shared. Furthermore, good hand hygiene and the use of sleeves, the shoulder, or tissues to cover coughs or sneezes is important to consistently practice.

Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine?

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (the ministry) is introducing a new publicly funded meningococcal B immunization program for individuals with high risk medical conditions in Ontario. Starting in December 2014, the ministry is offering the multicomponent meningococcal B vaccine (4CMenB or Bexsero[®]) to individuals with high risk conditions from 2 months through 17 years of age with the following conditions:

- a. Individuals with functional or anatomic asplenia
- b. Individuals with complement, properdin, factor D or primary antibody deficiencies
- c. Cochlear implant recipients (pre/post implants)
- d. Individuals with acquired complement deficiencies (e.g., receiving eculizumab)
- e. Individuals with HIV

The vaccine is also free of charge to close contacts of a case of serogroup B IMD that meets the public health criteria for chemoprophylaxis as well as for individuals at risk during an IMD outbreaks caused by *N. meningitis* serogroup B.

Two to four doses are required for high risk individuals, depending on the age at first dose. For more information about the high risk 4CMenB immunization program, please contact your health care provider.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Individuals with a history of anaphylaxis after a previous dose of a 4CMenB vaccine and individuals with proven immediate or anaphylactic hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine or its container should not receive the vaccine.

Who should consult their health care provider when considering the vaccine?

Individuals who:

- have any questions about the vaccine
- are allergic to latex
- have a weakened immune system
- have a bleeding disorder (hemophilia or any other condition that may slow down blood clotting) or taking blood-thinning medications
- have a severe infection with a high temperature
- have an allergy to any component of the vaccine, including allergy to the antibiotic kanamycin
- are pregnant, breastfeeding, thinks they may be pregnant or are planning to have a baby .

Is the 4CMenB vaccine safe and effective?

Yes, the 4CMenB vaccine is very safe and effective. Vaccine safety is a priority for the ministry. All publicly funded vaccines have to be tested to make sure they are both safe and effective. Vaccine safety is continually monitored by public health.

In infants and children (up to 10 years of age), common side effects of the vaccine tend to be mild and may include fever, loss of appetite, tenderness or discomfort at the injection site, skin rash, sleepiness, feeling irritable, unusual crying, vomiting and diarrhea. Other side effects in individuals 11 years of age and older may include pain at the injection site, painful muscles and joints, nausea, generally feeling unwell and headache. Severe reactions are rare.

As fever is a common side-effect of this vaccine in young children, talk to your health care provider about giving acetaminophen at the time of vaccination and/or giving the 4CmenB vaccine separately from other routine vaccines, to prevent fever in infants and children up to three years of age.

Please report any side effects or severe vaccine reactions to your health care provider or local public health unit. You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your health care provider.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or go to the nearest emergency department if any of the following reactions develop within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives;
- swelling of the face or mouth;
- trouble breathing;
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness;
- high fever (over 40°C);
- convulsions or seizures; or
- other serious symptoms (e.g., paraesthesia).

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the 4CMenB vaccine?

Talk to your health care provider or call your local public health unit for more information.

Your record of protection

After receiving a vaccine, make sure your personal immunization record (i.e., the "Yellow Card") is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

For More Information

Further information is available at:

- Your public health unit: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>.
- Immunization information is available at: <http://www.ontario.ca/vaccines>.