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# Meningococcal C-Conjugate Vaccine

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This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

## How are children protected against invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)?

Vaccines or needles are the best way to protect children against some very serious infections. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) strongly recommends routine immunization.

The meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine protects children against illness due to IMD serogroup C (IMD-C) and its complications.

## What is invasive meningococcal disease (IMD)?

IMD is a serious disease caused by a specific strain of bacteria, *Neisseria meningitidis*. There are several strains (serogroups) of the bacteria that cause IMD; serogroups A, B, C, W-135, and Y are the most common.

IMD often affects previously healthy people of all ages; they can become extremely ill rapidly. IMD can lead to serious infections of the blood (septicaemia), and the covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis).

## How do you get invasive meningococcal disease?

The bacteria that cause IMD can live in the body, in particular at the back of the nose and throat, without causing symptoms. Up to 10 per cent of the population carry the bacteria at any time, however, most people never develop active disease (IMD). The bacteria are spread through droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing.

Bacteria from the saliva of an infected person can be spread when common items are shared, e.g., beverages (bottles, straws), cigarettes, toothbrushes, lipstick.

## What is serogroup C?

Serogroup C is a specific strain or serogroup of IMD (IMD-C) and can result in severe long-term health complications or death. Persons who have been infected with IMD-C disease may develop skin scars, hearing loss and kidney problems or may require limb amputations.

## Why is the meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine important?

Serogroup C has been almost exclusively responsible for localized clusters or outbreaks of IMD in schools and communities. In Ontario, many of the cases of IMD-C are in adolescents and young adults.

The meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine provides long-lasting protection against IMD-C.

## Will this vaccine protect against other serogroups of IMD?

This vaccine only provides protection against IMD caused by serogroup C *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria. It will not protect against other serogroups of invasive meningococcal disease, or other organisms that cause meningitis (infection of the brain or spinal cord) or septicaemia (infection of the blood).

### **How effective is the vaccine?**

In the United Kingdom the effectiveness of the meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine in children aged 1 to 17 years ranged from 87 to 100 per cent. Following a large-scale immunization program, the number of deaths due to IMD-C in people under 20 years of age fell by 91 per cent.

### **Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine?**

People who have been in close contact with a person who has IMD-C are at greatest risk of infections. These people are already eligible to receive the meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine free of charge.

Also, one-year-old children born on or after September 1, 2003, can receive the meningococcal C-conjugate vaccine as part of their routine immunization.

Starting on January 1, 2005, the publicly funded vaccine will also be available for children aged 12 years (generally in grade 7) and youth aged 15 to 19 years, as well as people with medical conditions (i.e., functional or anatomic asplenia or complement, properdin or factor D deficiency) that put them at an increased risk of IMD.

### **Are there side effects from the vaccine?**

Most reactions tend to be mild and include soreness, redness, itching and/or rash where the needle was given. Other side effects such as headache, dizziness, and nausea may occur.

Severe reactions are rare.

Please report any side effects or severe vaccine reactions to your doctor/nurse practitioner or local public health unit.

### **Who should not get the vaccine?**

Persons should not receive the vaccine if they have allergies to the vaccine or any component to the vaccine, or if they had an anaphylactic reaction to a prior dose of the vaccine.

Safety in pregnancy has not been documented.

**You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your doctor/nurse practitioner or local public health unit.**

### **When should I call my doctor/nurse practitioner?**

You should call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if your child develops any of the following symptoms within three days of getting the needle:

- hives
- swelling of the mouth and throat
- trouble breathing, hoarseness or wheezing
- high fever (over 40° C or 104° F)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious reaction to the vaccine.

### **Who should I talk to if I have any questions?**

For more information please contact your doctor/nurse practitioner or your local public health unit.

### **How do I keep track of my child's immunizations?**

After your child receives any immunization, make sure his/her personal immunization record (sometimes called the Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place! You may be asked to show this record of immunization when your child registers for school or daycare.

### **Find out more**

For information about health services and resources:

[www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

For consumer-friendly health tips and information:

[www.HealthyOntario.com](http://www.HealthyOntario.com)

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343 toll free in Ontario  
TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000  
TTY 1-866-797-0007

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