

MENINGOCOCCAL ACYW-135 VACCINE (Menactra™)

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by a group of bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. Up to 10 percent of the population carry these bacteria in their nose and throat without feeling sick. In rare instances, the bacteria overcome the body's natural defences and cause serious diseases, including meningococcal meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain) and meningococemia (widespread infection of the blood). Meningococcal disease can cause permanent hearing loss, neurological damage or limb loss and is fatal in about ten percent of cases.

Meningococcal disease is most common in children under 5, adolescents, and young adults.

How does meningococcal disease spread?

Meningococcal bacteria are spread by direct contact with saliva and nasal mucus, such as through kissing or sharing food, drinks, musical instruments, cigarettes, or any other item that have been in the mouth of a person with the disease.

How does someone know if they have meningococcal disease?

The symptoms of meningococcal disease can vary widely, but include sudden onset of fever, severe headache, vomiting, stiff neck, and sensitivity to light. A purple rash, sleepiness, confusion, and, in severe cases, coma may also occur. Infants can have a high pitched cry, an arched back, decreased appetite, or difficulty feeding. Symptoms will usually appear within two to ten days after being exposed to the bacteria. Meningococemia can be detected through a blood sample, and meningococcal meningitis can be detected by sampling the fluid around the spine.

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

To prevent the spread of Meningococcal disease, objects that have come into contact with another person's mouth should not be shared. Good hand hygiene and the use of sleeves, the shoulder, or tissues to cover coughs and sneezes are also important ways to prevent the spread of this disease. There are vaccines available in Canada that can protect against one or more strains of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease.

What does the Meningococcal ACYW-135 (Men-ACYW-135) vaccine protect against?

The Men-ACYW-135 vaccine prevents four strains of the bacteria that cause Meningococcal disease: A, C, Y, and W-135. These four strains caused more than half of the reported cases of meningococcal disease in Ontario between 1995 and 2006.

Who can get the Men-ACYW-135 vaccine?

Beginning September 2009, the Men-ACYW-135 immunization will be available for free to all grade 7 students in Ontario and will be provided through immunization programs in schools. Immunization is also available for free for individuals between the ages of 2 and 55 years who do not have a spleen or are a close contact of a confirmed case of meningococcal disease caused by types A, C, Y or W-135.

Is the Men-ACYW-135 vaccine safe?

Yes, most people who get the vaccine have no side effects. If reactions occur, they are generally mild and may include: pain, redness and swelling at the site of the injection, headache, malaise and irritability. Allergic reactions like hives, wheezing, and swelling of the mouth or face can happen very rarely after any vaccine, and require immediate attention.

How is the Men-ACYW-135 vaccine given?

The Men-ACYW-135 vaccine is given as an injection in the muscle of the upper arm. Recent studies have indicated good protection against Meningococcal disease up to five years after immunization. No further boosters are required at this time.

Other important information:

- Individuals, who have already had the Meningococcal C vaccination, during routine infant immunizations, should still receive the Men-ACYW-135 vaccine in adolescence, unless they have been vaccinated with another *Neisseria meningitidis* polysaccharide vaccine within the last six months.
- Individuals who should not receive this vaccine include those who are allergic to the vaccine or any of its components or who have previously had Guillian-Barré Syndrome occurring within eight weeks of a previous immunization.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should consult with their health care provider before receiving this vaccine.