Alberta Health Services

Meningococcal (Group) B Vaccine
Information Sheet

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. The bacteria can cause two serious diseases:

- Meningococcal meningitis: an infection of the covering of the brain and spinal cord
- Meningococcemia: a more serious infection of the blood

The disease can develop in any age group; however, rates of meningococcal disease are highest in children younger than 5 years of age and in adolescents 15 to 19 years of age.

How is *Neisseria meningitidis* spread?

The infection is spread from one person to another through direct contact with the secretions of the nose and throat of an infected person. This could occur with kissing, sharing of food, drinks, lipstick, lipbalm, soothers, straws or water bottles. Infected persons may have no symptoms of disease.

How can meningococcal disease be prevented?

- Meningococcal vaccines can prevent some types of meningococcal infections. Meningococcal B vaccine, although a highly effective vaccine, may not protect against all circulating meningococcal B strains.
- Avoid contact with an infected person's saliva by not sharing food, drinks, lip balm, soothers, straws or water bottles.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains alcohol.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. In Canada, vaccines must undergo extensive laboratory and field-testing. They must pass a rigorous licensing procedure with the federal government before they can be used. Once a vaccine has been approved for use, every lot is tested for safety and quality.

The bacteria in the meningococcal B vaccine have been killed. Therefore, a person cannot get meningococcal disease from the vaccine.

Who should get the vaccine?

- Individuals at risk of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) due to underlying medical conditions
- Household and close contacts of individuals who are confirmed to have meningococcal B invasive meningococcal disease (IMD).

Who should not have the meningococcal B vaccine?

Persons should not receive this vaccine if they:

- have a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to this vaccine or any components
- have had an unusually severe reaction to this vaccine in the past

What are the possible side effects to the meningococcal B vaccine?
Most reactions are mild to moderate and are resolved within 48 hours.

Possible reactions include:
- redness, pain and/or swelling where the needle was given

Other possible reactions:
- Children younger than 11 years of age
  - irritability, unusual crying, change in appetite, fatigue, rash, sleepiness, stomach upset.
  - fever
  - rare reaction (may affect up to 1 in 1000 people). Kawasaki disease with symptoms of fever, rash on trunk, and sometimes followed by peeling of skin on hands and fingers, swollen glands in the neck, red eyes, lips, throat and glands in the neck, red eyes, lips, throat and tongue.
- Adolescents and adults
  - headache, malaise, muscles and joint pains, fever and nausea.
  - pain at the injection site

As with any immunization, unexpected or unusual side effects can occur. This includes severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

What should you do if you have a reaction to the meningococcal B vaccine?
- Apply a cool moist cloth to the area where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling.
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol™) to reduce the pain or if a fever develops
  - Aspirin® (ASA) is not recommended for individuals under 19 years of age.
- Report any unusual reactions to Health Link Alberta

Where can I get the meningococcal B immunization?
In Alberta, meningococcal (Group) B vaccine is available through public health clinics.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call **Health Link Alberta** at:
- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

Or visit www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca for health information online.

This material is designed for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have specific questions please consult your doctor or appropriate healthcare professional.