

Meningococcal ACWY Vaccination Program

Q&As for General Practitioners, Practice Nurses and Immunisation Providers

Why vaccinate young people against meningococcal strains?

Meningococcal disease is most commonly caused by serogroups A, B, C, W and Y.

Since 2014, meningococcal W and meningococcal Y cases have increased across Australia. Meningococcal W is associated with a higher fatality rate, compared with other strains of meningococcal disease circulating in Australia.

Older adolescents and young adults are at increased risk of meningococcal disease and more likely to spread the bacteria to others.

The quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (4vMenCV) provided through this program will protect against the meningococcal serogroups A, C, W and Y. Studies have shown that the effectiveness of this vaccine is between 80 and 85 percent in young people.

The vaccination program aims to directly protect older adolescents and young adults, and reduce risks for the community as a whole by decreasing the number of people carrying the bacteria in their nose and throat.

How is the program being implemented?

A single dose of 4vMenCV will be offered to students in year 10 through a school vaccination program. A catch-up program will be available to all people aged between 16 and 19 years through GPs in the first year of the program beginning in February 2018.

Students in year 10 who miss 4vMenCV through the school vaccination program will be able to receive it through their GP in the same calendar year.

Which vaccine will be used?

Menactra is a quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine (4vMenCV), which protects against serogroups A, C, W, and Y. This vaccine does not protect against serogroup B.

How many doses are required?

Only one dose of 4vMenCV is required for year 10 students or for 16 to 19 year olds. For patients who have a condition associated with an increased risk of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD), for example, patients with functional or anatomical asplenia or complement disorder, additional doses may be required. For risk factors and schedules for those at increased risk of IMD, refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

What are the common short term side effects?

Meningococcal conjugate vaccines are generally considered safe and well tolerated. Common adverse reactions include pain, erythema and swelling at the injection site, fever, chills, headaches, rash, nausea and loss of appetite. If your patient experiences a serious or unexpected adverse event following immunisation please complete the Immunisation Adverse Event Reporting form available from <https://tinyurl.com/ACTHealthAEFI> or call the Immunisation Unit of the ACT Health Directorate on (02) 6205 2300.

What contraindications are there to giving the vaccine?

The only absolute contraindications to meningococcal vaccines are:

- anaphylaxis following a previous dose of any meningococcal vaccine; and
- anaphylaxis following any vaccine component.

Previous meningococcal disease, regardless of the serogroup, is *not* a contraindication to administration of any meningococcal vaccine.

How do I access the vaccine?

All general practices and clinics will receive a small base stock of the vaccine from February 2018 for the catch-up program. Additional orders of stock can be made by submitting a vaccine order form to the Vaccine Management Unit, Health Protection Service. For further information, contact (02) 6205 2300.

Vaccine order forms can be downloaded from the ACT Health website:

<http://health.act.gov.au/our-services/immunisation/forms-and-information>

My patient has previously received the meningococcal C vaccine, should they still receive 4vMenCV?

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

vaccination with the meningococcal C vaccine is not a contraindication to receiving 4vMenCV. It is important that eligible older adolescents are vaccinated with 4vMenCV to protect them against the A, W and Y strains not contained in the meningococcal C vaccine.

The combination *haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) and meningococcal C vaccine included in the National Immunisation Program Schedule at 12 months should continue to be provided to infants.

My patient has previously received 4vMenCV or a quadrivalent polysaccharide meningococcal vaccine, should they still receive 4vMenCV through the vaccination program?

Yes. Eligible young people can receive another dose of 4vMenCV even if the previous dose was within the past five years. There should be at least a four week gap between doses. Repeat vaccination can boost immunity and carries minimal risk of adverse reactions.

Eligible young people who have been vaccinated with a polysaccharide meningococcal vaccine (at any age) can be vaccinated with 4vMenCV, so long as six months have passed since receiving the last dose of polysaccharide vaccine. Polysaccharide meningococcal vaccines provide protection for a limited time period.

My patient is pregnant or breastfeeding, can she receive the 4vMenCV?

Meningococcal vaccines are not routinely recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women but can be given to women at increased risk of IMD. For further information, refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook.

Although the product information for Menactra states that there are no data on the use of this vaccine in lactating women, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation recommends that breastfeeding women can be vaccinated.

How can we target the 16 to 19 year old catch-up group?

Promotional materials will be provided by ACT Health with delivery of vaccine for the program. Consider actively promoting the vaccine by displaying this material in your practice, including information in patient newsletters, and where possible, implementing patient alerts and reminders through your practice management software.

How do I know if my patient has missed their dose at school?

If a year 10 student is absent or unwell when vaccination occurs and their parent/guardian has provided consent for the vaccine, a letter will be sent to their postal address advising

how to access the vaccine through their GP. The 4vMenCV is the only vaccine offered to this age cohort through schools. The Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) may not be an accurate record of vaccinations delivered through the school program.

What if my patient is not in year 10 or is outside the 16-19 year age group?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccination program is for older adolescents. If your patient is outside the recommended cohort for this program and wishes to be vaccinated, vaccines for serogroup B and the A, C, W and Y serogroups are available through prescription on the private market. Vaccination outside the recommended cohorts is likely to provide individual protection, but not expected to achieve the same population health benefits as vaccinating older adolescents.

My patient has moved from interstate, should they receive the vaccine?

This vaccination program is specific to the ACT. Most other states and territories also have a meningococcal ACWY vaccination program for adolescents. If your patient is eligible and they have not been vaccinated in another state or territory, they should receive the 4vMenCV.

Do I need to keep records of 4vMenCV administered?

Yes, as with all other vaccinations, it is important to ensure that data is being entered onto AIR. This is best practice and assists in providing a true record of vaccination status for all individuals and in determining immunisation coverage in the ACT. Downloading the latest version of your practice management software will ensure you have access to the latest AIR functionality and vaccine codes.

Further Information

For further information about meningococcal vaccination or the meningococcal ACWY vaccination program, visit <http://www.health.act.gov.au/our-services/immunisation/high-school-immunisation-program> or contact the Immunisation Unit, Health Protection Service on (02) 6205 2300.

Additional Resources

- Australian Technical Advisory Group of Immunisation, Australian Immunisation Handbook:
<http://immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbook10-home>
- National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance, Meningococcal Vaccines Frequently Asked Questions:
http://www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/fact-sheets/meningococcal-vaccines-FAQ.pdf

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