

# Meningococcal B vaccine for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

## Information for Immunisation Providers

From 1 July 2020, the meningococcal B vaccine (Bexsero®) is being added to the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children less than 2 years of age.

The incidence of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD) caused by serogroup B is about 4 times higher in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children <2 years than in non-indigenous children. It is also highest in those aged <2 years compared with other age groups.

## Meningococcal B - NIP Schedule

The Meningococcal B vaccine (Bexsero®) has been included in the NIP schedule as follows:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthy infants – 3 doses (2, 4 and 12 months)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with risk conditions<sup>1</sup> (2, 4, 6 and 12 months)

### Catch-up program

Catch-up is available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children ≤2 years of age (up to 23 months) for three years (until 30 June 2023).

The number of doses required depends on the age of the child when they start the vaccine course:

Age at start of vaccine course	Dose requirements (without any medical conditions associated with increased risk of invasive meningococcal disease)
6 weeks to 5 months	3 doses (8 weeks between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> doses; 3 <sup>rd</sup> dose at 12 months of age or 8 weeks after 2 <sup>nd</sup> dose, whichever is later)
6-11 months	3 doses (8 weeks between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> doses; 3 <sup>rd</sup> dose at 12 months of age or 8 weeks after 2 <sup>nd</sup> dose, whichever is later)
12-23 months	2 doses (8 weeks between doses)

**Bexsero® can be safely administered with other NIP vaccines.**

*\*Always check the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) and a child's immunisation records prior to vaccination.*

## Prophylactic use of Paracetamol

**It is important to alert parents to the need to buy paracetamol prior to vaccination.**

Children <2 years of age are recommended to receive prophylactic paracetamol with every dose of Bexsero®. This is because of the increased risk of fever associated with receiving Bexsero®.

- Give the first dose (15mg/kg/dose) of paracetamol within 30 minutes before, or as soon as practicable after, receiving the vaccine, regardless of whether the child has a fever.
- This can be followed by 2 more doses of paracetamol given 6 hours apart.

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook for further information.



Other common adverse events following Bexsero<sup>®</sup> vaccine administration include:

- pain or tenderness, swelling, induration and erythema at the injection site
- irritability
- sleepiness
- unusual crying and change in appetite
- headache and malaise (more commonly reported among adolescents and young adults).

### *Reporting Adverse Event Following Immunisation (AEFI)*

Suspected AEFI should be reported to the Immunisation Unit, Health Protection Service using the Immunisation Adverse Event Reporting Form, or by contacting the Health Protection Service, Immunisation Unit on (02) 5124 9800.

## Addressing parental concerns

### *Number of vaccines being administered in one session*

Parents may raise concerns about the number of vaccines being administered in one session. Parents should be reassured that the aim of immunisation is to provide protection against harmful diseases at the very earliest opportunity. Studies have demonstrated that there are no harmful effects from administering multiple vaccines in one session. Vaccines only contain a small number of antigens compared with the large number that children encounter every day in their environment.

### *Requests for meningococcal vaccine to be administered separately to other routine immunisations.*

Parents should be discouraged from delaying immunisation as this inevitably delays protection. The immunisation schedule has been designed to ensure optimal protection against diseases that are most common in the very young. If a parent insists, a minimum 3-day interval is recommended.

## Further information

ACT Health, Health Protection Service Immunisation Enquiry line 51249800

ACT Health website - <https://health.act.gov.au/services/immunisation>

Australian Immunisation Handbook - <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/>

NCIRS - <http://ncirs.org.au/health-professionals>

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