



# Meningococcal ACWY childhood vaccination program – FAQs

## **What is the WA childhood Meningococcal ACWY (MenACWY) vaccination program?**

The WA childhood MenACWY vaccination program provides free meningococcal vaccine to children aged 12 months to less than 5 years. This vaccine will help protect against meningococcal types A, C, W and Y so it is called the MenACWY vaccine.

## **Why has WA initiated a childhood MenACWY vaccination program?**

The number of invasive meningococcal infections in WA doubled between 2016 and 2017. Most of the increase in infections has been caused by types covered in the MenACWY vaccine.

In response to this emerging threat, WA Health is offering a MenACWY vaccination program for children as they turn 12 months of age, and a time-limited catch up for children aged 12 months to less than 5 years.

## **Why is the program targeting children in this age group?**

Children under 5 years have the highest risk of developing meningococcal disease in WA. In 2017, there was more than double the number of cases among children in this age group than any other 5-year age group.

## **How much will this program cost?**

The estimated cost for the childhood MenACWY Vaccination program in 2018 is \$5.7M all which will be used to purchase vaccine.

## **Why is the State funding the MenACWY vaccine?**

Shortly after the start of the WA MenACWY state program, the Commonwealth Government announced that they will add the MenACWY vaccine to the National Immunisation Program for all 12 month olds from the second half of 2018. The WA State Government will continue to offer the MenACWY vaccine to 12 month olds until the national program begins. This initiative ensures that more young Western Australians will be protected earlier than their interstate peers.

The catch-up for children from 12 months to less than 5 years is unique to Western Australia and will continue until the end of 2018.

## **Why use the MenACWY vaccine?**

Meningococcal type W was the type responsible for most of the recent cases in WA. While all meningococcal infections can be serious, illness caused by type W tend to be even more severe than

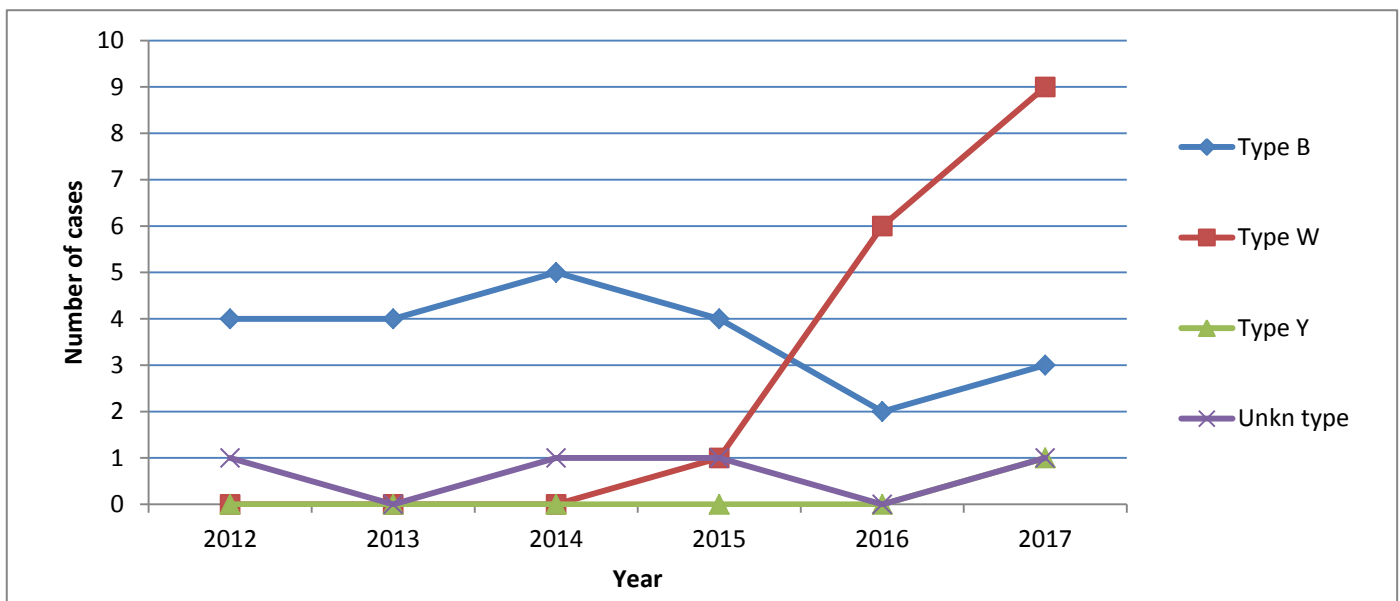


those associated with other types of meningococcal disease. The MenACWY vaccine protects against type W meningococcal disease, and also for type Y, which is also increasing in the community. In addition, the vaccine protects against type C and A, which are currently rare in Australia. The vaccine does not protect against type B meningococcal disease.

### Is the meningococcal B (MenB) vaccine also free?

No. Meningococcal B vaccine is not covered by the free program. The overall number of cases of meningococcal type B infections in WA has remained relatively constant, while the number of cases with type W has increased (see figure below). The State government is funding the MenACWY vaccine so that young children will be protected from the most common strains causing invasive meningococcal disease. Anyone who wishes to receive the MenB vaccine can make an appointment to have it administered privately by a GP. Costs may vary by provider. Parents should contact their private health insurance provider for further information about whether they may be eligible for a refund for part of the vaccine cost.

Number of meningococcal infections in WA children less than 5 years of age, 2012-2017 by serogroup type



### Which vaccines will be used?

Two brands of the MenACWY vaccine will be used. Both vaccines, Nimenrix® and Menveo®, protect against four types of meningococcal bacteria: A, C, W and Y, and are similar in terms of safety and efficacy.

- **Nimenrix®** is being used for children aged from 12 months to less than 2 years.
- **Menveo®** is being used for children aged from 2 to less than 5 years.



## **How is the vaccine given?**

The MenACWY vaccine can be safely administered in either the upper arm or the upper thigh, depending on the age of the vaccine recipient.

## **My child already received a MenC vaccine at 12 months of age, is this vaccine different?**

Yes, the vaccines used in this program protect against four types of meningococcal bacteria: A, C, W and Y. Menitorix (Meningococcal C and Hib vaccine) given routinely at 12 months only protects against meningococcal type C.

## **How effective is the MenACWY vaccine and how long does it last?**

Studies have shown that the effectiveness of the meningococcal ACWY vaccines is between 80 to 85 per cent. The protection provided is estimated to last approximately 3 to 5 years.

## **How long does it take for immunity to develop after having the vaccine?**

It takes 2 to 4 weeks for immunity to develop after MenACWY vaccination.

## **Is a booster dose required?**

The need for, and timing of, a routine booster dose has not yet been determined. However, some individuals who have medical conditions associated with an increased risk of invasive meningococcal disease may require a second dose. These include:

- defects in or deficiency of complement components, including factor H, factor D or properdin deficiency
- current or future treatment with eculizumab (a monoclonal antibody directed against complement component C5)
- functional or anatomical asplenia
- HIV infection, regardless of stage of disease or CD4+ count
- haematopoietic stem cell transplant

Patients and providers should discuss the need for a booster dose, based on individual circumstances.

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

Many studies have shown that the vaccines used in the WA Paediatric Meningococcal ACWY Vaccination program are safe to use in children and adults. As with any vaccine, there may be some mild side effects. These include injection site pain, redness and swelling, myalgia, headache, nausea, loss of appetite and fever. Serious vaccine reactions are similar to those of other childhood vaccines and are very rare.



## **Can the vaccine cause meningococcal disease?**

No. Only the *Neisseria meningitidis* bacterium can cause meningococcal disease. The vaccine does not contain any live bacteria.

## **How will the program work?**

Parents and guardians of children aged from 12 months to less than 5 years should contact their immunisation provider to schedule an appointment for their child to get the MenACWY vaccine. Calling ahead for an appointment is important so the provider can make sure they have the vaccine in stock and available. Children who are turning one will be offered the MenACWY vaccine, along with their other scheduled vaccines, at their 12-month vaccination appointment.

## **Will this vaccine affect my government payments?**

Whether your child receives the MenACWY vaccine or not will have no effect on whether you are eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A Supplement or Child Care Benefits payments. The WA MenACWY program complements, but does not alter timing for vaccines included in the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule. Parents should continue to follow the National Childhood Immunisation Schedule so that they remain eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A Supplement or Child Care Benefits payments.

## **Can children who already received privately funded vaccine before the program started claim a rebate?**

Families who have already had their children vaccinated with MenACWY prior to initiation of the State-funded program have been proactive in ensuring their children are protected against meningococcal disease. The State-funded program provides free MenACWY vaccine for any child aged 1 to less than 5 years from 23 January 2018, but will not provide financial compensation to individuals who purchased the MenACWY vaccine prior to that date. Parents should contact their private health insurance cover to ask if they may be eligible for a refund for part of the privately purchased MenACWY vaccine cost.

## **How long will the WA childhood MenACWY vaccination program run?**

The program will offer catch-up vaccinations to children who have turned 12 months through to less than 5 years until 31 December 2018.

## **Does the WA childhood MenACWY vaccination program change the scheduling for other immunisations currently part of the National Immunisation Program (NIP)?**

No. The availability of state-funded MenACWY vaccine for children aged 12 months to less than 5 years of age supplements the current immunisation schedule. The other childhood vaccinations should still be given at the currently recommended immunisation schedule points.



## **Can children have the MenACWY vaccine on the same day as another vaccine?**

MenACWY vaccines are safe to administer at the same time with other vaccines. Parents and providers are encouraged to make sure that children who present to receive MenACWY vaccine are also up-to-date with their other vaccinations. If a parent is concerned about administration of an additional vaccine during a routinely scheduled vaccination visit, the MenACWY vaccine can be administered at least 4 weeks after any previous vaccinations.

## **Should children who have received a MenACWY vaccine previously be vaccinated?**

Parents of children who have already received a MenACWY vaccine should talk to their doctor to determine if their child would benefit from additional doses. This could occur, for example, if the child has an underlying medical illness or they were vaccinated before they were 12 months old.

## **Will WA continue to offer MenACWY vaccine to 15 to 19 year olds?**

Yes. The WA childhood MenACWY vaccination program complements the MenACWY vaccination program for 15 to 19 year olds. Year 10 students will be offered the MenACWY vaccine at school and GPs continue to catch-up persons 15 to 19 years of age who request vaccination. Vaccinating 15 to 19 years olds is still important because the highest rates of meningococcal carriage occur in this age group; people who carry the bacteria can transmit it to others who are at increased risk of serious illness, including young children. Vaccinating 15 to 19 years olds should help to both decrease illness from meningococcal W in this age group and to prevent carriage.

Reducing carriage is anticipated to reduce transmission within the larger community, including young children, going forward. Adolescents aged 15 to 19 years should be offered the Menveo® brand of vaccine (single dose). Nimenrix® will be reserved for children aged <2 years of age.

## **Why does eligibility for the WA free paediatric meningococcal ACWY (MenACWY) vaccination program start at 12 months of age?**

One of the three MenACWY vaccines registered for use in Australia (i.e. Menveo®) can be administered to children less than 12 months of age, but up to four doses are needed, the last of which must be given at 12 months of age or later. This means that full protection can either be attained through a series of Menveo® vaccinations that finish at 12 months, or alternatively, with a single dose of Nimenrix® MenACWY vaccine administered at 12 months. WA Health has determined that the vaccination strategy requiring a single injection at 12 months of age is preferable to a series of multiple doses early in life with a final vaccination at 12 months of age. This approach reduces the number of injections required to ultimately confer protection and minimises potential implementation challenges posed by adding multiple doses to the already busy infant immunisation schedule.

Parents who wish to initiate MenACWY vaccinations prior to their child's first birthday can procure it privately and ask to have the vaccine administered by their child's GP.



## **Why is State-funded MenACWY vaccine being provided for children 1 through 4 years and persons 15-19 years of age, but not children aged between 5-15 years?**

The age groups eligible for free MenACWY in WA are those at highest risk of meningococcal disease and those with the highest rates of meningococcal carriage. Children less than 5 years old have the highest incidence of meningococcal disease in WA and have more than double the risk of any other 5 year age group. Persons 15 to 19 years of age have the highest rates of meningococcal carriage and can transmit the bacteria to others who are at increased risk of serious illness, including young children. Reducing carriage in this cohort will help to reduce transmission within the larger community, which should ultimately help protect persons in other age groups. Parents of children aged 5 to less than 15 years of age who wish to vaccinate their children can purchase the MenACWY vaccine privately for approximately \$60-100.

## **Why are children in other age groups not receiving free vaccine?**

Children aged between 12 months and less than 5 years and from 15 to 19 years are receiving free vaccinations because they are at the greatest risk of meningococcal disease and carriage. Vaccination for children outside these age groups can be arranged privately through GPs.

## **What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?**

The symptoms of meningococcal disease can include: fever, headache, neck stiffness, muscle or joint pains, drowsiness, confusion, nausea and vomiting and a rash of red-purple spots or bruises. Common symptoms of meningococcal disease in babies include: fever, rapid breathing, rash, vomiting, irritability, drowsiness, poor feeding and pale skin.

If you or someone you know develops symptoms or signs consistent with meningococcal disease consult your family doctor or the Emergency Department of the closest hospital immediately.

## **How does meningococcal disease spread?**

Meningococcal bacteria spread through the exchange of respiratory secretions from the back of the nose and throat. Generally it takes close, prolonged contact to spread, such as living in the same household or intimate kissing with someone who is carrying the bacteria. Meningococcal bacteria are not as contagious as microorganisms that cause the common cold or the flu. People do not catch them through casual contact or by breathing the air where someone with meningococcal disease has been.

## **Where can I get my child immunised?**

The vaccine will be available through existing childhood immunisation providers in WA, such as general practice surgeries (GPs), Community Health Clinics, some Local Governments Population/Public Health Units and Aboriginal Medical Services.



## Where can I get more information about meningococcal disease?

- [healthywa.wa.gov.au/immunisation](http://healthywa.wa.gov.au/immunisation)
- [The Australian Immunisation Handbook online \(10<sup>th</sup> Edition\): immunise.health.gov.au](http://immunise.health.gov.au)

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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