

News story: Parents urged to remind teenagers to get MenACWY vaccine

Parents are being reminded this summer to encourage their 18 year old children to get vaccinated against deadly meningitis and septicaemia. Those who are due to leave school this summer, or aged 17 to 18 and are not in school (born between 1 September 1998 and 31 August 1999) are now eligible.

The MenACWY jab protects against 4 strains of meningococcal disease which cause meningitis and septicaemia, known as strains A, C, W and Y. MenW is one of the most aggressive and life threatening forms and meningococcal disease can be fatal. Many survivors are left with life changing disabilities, including brain damage and loss of limbs. The MenACWY vaccine remains the best form of protection against the A, C, W, and Y strains with a 100% effectiveness rate in those that have been vaccinated so far.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at PHE said:

The MenACWY vaccination programme will save lives and prevent lifelong and devastating disability. We have seen a rapid increase in MenW cases across England in recent years and vaccination is the most effective way of protecting against infection.

Young people are particularly at risk as they are carriers of the disease. Being in confined environments with close contact, such as university halls, hostels when travelling, or attending festivals, increase the chances of infection if unprotected.

Get vaccinated as soon as possible, remain vigilant and seek urgent medical help if you have concerns for yourself or friends.

New entrants to higher education (university freshers) are also eligible. Anyone who is eligible and has missed vaccination in previous years remains eligible up to their 25th birthday and is urged to have the MenACWY vaccine.

While the vaccine also helps protect against Men A, C, W and Y, it does not cover all forms of meningococcal disease. It is therefore important for parents and young people to be vigilant in spotting early symptoms and to seek early medical assistance if they are concerned. Not everyone will develop these symptoms and they can appear in any order but common symptoms may include:

- pale, blotchy skin with or without a rash
- irritability and/or confusion
- severe headache, joint or muscle pains
- dislike of bright lights
- stiff neck
- convulsions or seizures

- fever, cold hands and feet
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- drowsiness or difficult to wake up

Vinny Smith, Chief Executive of Meningitis Research Foundation said:

Sadly, we know too many people who have been struck down by MenW. 18 year old Lauren Sandell fell ill last year in her second week of university, having tried to get the vaccine before leaving home. She mistook her early symptoms for a mild case of food poisoning. 2 days later her symptoms got rapidly worse and she died just as the ambulance arrived.

If you don't know whether you are entitled to the free vaccine, our online eligibility checker will make it easy to find out. If everyone who is eligible gets it, this will not only protect them but will also help protect others by stopping the bacteria from spreading.

Dr Tom Nutt, Chief Executive at the charity Meningitis Now, said:

It's vital that young people and their parents are not complacent about the threat of meningitis, and we urge all those eligible for this lifesaving vaccination to arrange to get it today. Meningitis can be a devastating disease, killing 1 in 10 and leaving a third of survivors with lifelong after-effects such as hearing loss, epilepsy, limb loss or learning difficulties. With teenagers being a high-risk group, we welcome this timely reminder for parents to ensure their loved ones take this easy step to help protect themselves.