



Preventing Meningitis and Related Diseases

What Is Group C meningococcal disease?

The disease is an infection caused by a bacteria. It results in serious infections of the brain's covering (meningitis), the blood or the organs.

The bacteria causes about 100 cases of serious illness in Canada every year. Most are children under age 5 or teenagers. About 1 in 10 people who get the infection die. Others become deaf or paralyzed. Some have kidney damage or scars.

The bacteria is spread by the saliva or droplets with direct physical contact, combined with activities such as kissing, coughing and sneezing. It can stay in the throat and nose without causing infection. Most people who have contact with this bacteria do not become ill.

It can enter the bloodstream and reach the lining of the brain and spinal cord causing meningitis. It causes sudden onset of fever, intense headache, stiff neck, vomiting and sometimes a purple/red rash. Symptoms progress rapidly.

Can the infection be treated?

Yes. Doctors use antibiotics to treat the infection. Unfortunately, the disease can still cause many long-lasting problems, including death.

Can the infection be prevented?

Vaccination is the best way to **prevent** the disease.

You can also protect yourself by not sharing anything that has been in your mouth, including:

- water bottles, straws or beverages
- lipstick or lip balm
- cigarettes
- toothbrushes
- mouth guards
- food or candy
- toys
- musical instruments with mouthpieces

At sports games, every athlete needs his or her own water bottle and mouth guard.

Who needs the vaccine?

According to Health Canada, all children (1-19 years of age) should get the needle. This includes teenagers because they tend to share food, beverages, cigarettes, and other things that can spread the bacteria.

Who should **not** get the shot?

- People who have had bad reactions to other vaccines, including allergic reactions
- Pregnant women
- People who are very sick - wait until you are feeling better
- People who have had this vaccine in the last 5 years

*Note: People with egg allergies are unable to get some vaccines. This vaccine **is safe** for people with egg allergies.*

Does the vaccine work?

The vaccine works very well. It provides protection within 10-14 days of receiving the shot and its thought to have lifetime protection.

Is it safe?

You cannot get the disease from the vaccine. Some people may have some soreness, redness or swelling where the needle was given. Very few people will have mild fever or irritability. These problems usually clear up in a few days.

How can I learn more?

Call your local health centre, public health unit or medical clinic and talk to your nurse/doctor. You can also find good information on these Internet sites.

Department of Health and Social Services
www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca

Canadian Pediatric Society
www.caringforkids.cps.ca
(Click on "Childhood Vaccines," then on "Meningococcal Vaccine.")