

Meningococcal W Vaccination Program

General Fact Sheet

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but severe bacterial infection that can cause lifelong disability or death and can affect people at any age.

Meningococcal bacteria are carried in the nose and throat of some healthy people and are spread through close prolonged contact. The bacteria are more commonly found in teenagers and young adults.

There are a number of different strains of meningococcal bacteria. The different strains of bacteria are named by letters of the alphabet such as A, B, C, W and Y.

Why is the Tasmanian Health Department offering this program?

Meningococcal W has increased significantly across Australia from 2014 onwards. In Tasmania, cases more than tripled in 2016 compared with previous years. Meningococcal W disease is more severe with a higher chance of an infected person dying from the disease than other types of meningococcal disease circulating in Australia.

What is the Meningococcal W Vaccination Program?

The Tasmanian Government is funding a free meningococcal W vaccine for teenagers aged 15 to 19 years.

The program will end 30 April 2018.

Who is eligible to receive a free vaccine?

All Tasmanian teenagers who are aged 15 to 19 years who were born between 1 August 1997 and 30 April 2003 are eligible to receive a free meningococcal W vaccine.

In 2018:

- All Year 10 students and students in Years 11 and 12 who have not had the vaccine will be offered the vaccine through the School-based Immunisation Program, in Term One.
- Teenagers aged 15 to 19 years who are no longer in school can get the vaccine through their GP or council clinic.

Although the vaccine is free, GPs may charge a consultation fee. Check with your local council for session times.

The Meningococcal W Vaccination Program will occur in public, independent and catholic high schools and colleges.

Why is this program targeting 15 to 19 year olds?

Immunisation experts say the vaccine will have the best results if focussed on older teenagers.

While meningococcal disease can affect people of any age, older teenagers are more likely to carry and spread the bacteria to others. The reason we are vaccinating 15 to 19 year olds is to reduce their risk of meningococcal W disease and to reduce the risk for the wider community.

What is the vaccine being offered?

The Tasmanian Meningococcal W Vaccination Program will use a vaccine that provides protection against meningococcal A, C, W, and Y disease. Only one dose is required.

Is the meningococcal ACWY vaccine safe?

The meningococcal ACWY vaccine is safe and effective. We know this because the vaccine has been used safely to prevent the spread of disease in the United Kingdom and United States of America for many years. Side effects are mostly mild and don't last long. The most common side effects are fever or redness, pain or swelling at the injection site. Serious side effects are very rare.

Vaccines used in Australia must pass strict safety testing before being approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). In addition, the TGA monitors the safety of vaccines once they are in use.

When will clinics be held at schools?

The date and time of school vaccination clinics are currently being determined by schools and the local councils.

Students in Year 10, 11 or 12 will receive an information/consent pack for the Meningococcal W Vaccination Program from their school.

Can I get a reimbursement from the government if my 15 to 19 year old has previously received a vaccine that I paid for?

No. If you paid to have a 15 to 19 year old vaccinated before the program started, unfortunately you cannot be reimbursed by the government for this cost.

Can people of other ages access meningococcal ACWY vaccine?

People of other ages who wish to protect themselves against meningococcal W disease can access the vaccine privately through their GP. The cost is approximately \$80 to \$100.

What if a person has already been vaccinated against meningococcal C?

Many older teenagers in the target group for the Meningococcal W Vaccination Program will have received a meningococcal C vaccine as a child. You should still have the ACWY vaccine. It provides protection against three other strains (A, W and Y) and act as a booster for the C strain.

Where can I find more information about immunisation and meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal Disease:

- DHHS Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet:
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/infectious_diseases/meningococcal_disease
- Immunise Australia- Meningococcal Disease:
www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-meningococcal
- Australian Government Department of Health – Meningococcal W Disease:
www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-meningococcal-W.htm

Meningococcal Vaccines:

- The Australian Immunisation Handbook- Meningococcal Disease:
www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbook10-home~handbook10part4~handbook10-4-10
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance- Meningococcal Vaccines Fact Sheet:
www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/fact-sheets/meningococcal-vaccines-fact-sheet.pdf

Tasmanian Meningococcal W Program:

- www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/menw

Call the Public Health Hotline – Tasmania on **1800 671 738** to speak to a Clinical Nurse Consultant.

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