

HELP PROTECT YOUR TEENAGER AGAINST MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE:

2 DOSES OF VACCINE ARE NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN PROTECTION

As a parent concerned about your child's health, you are familiar with the vaccines given during the infant and toddler years to help protect against infectious diseases.

Vaccines are important in the teenage years as well. One of the vaccine-preventable diseases you should know about is meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease is rare but can be devastating, disabling, and potentially fatal.

- Adolescents and young adults are among those at greatest risk.
- The disease strikes suddenly, spreads rapidly throughout the body, and can become life-threatening within hours.
- Even when infected patients receive appropriate antibiotic treatment, 10%-15% will die.
- Up to 20% of persons who survive the disease will develop lifelong disabilities, such as amputation of limbs, hearing loss, or brain damage.

Fortunately, safe and effective vaccines are available and have been given to millions of young people. These vaccines, known collectively as meningococcal conjugate vaccine or MCV4, help protect against 4 different types of meningococcal disease—Group A, Group C, Group W, and Group Y.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends the following vaccination schedule¹:

ACIP Recommendations for MCV4¹

Give dose #1 at 11-12 years of age
AND dose #2 at 16 years of age

Recommendations if dose #1 is delayed:

- If dose #1 is delayed until 13-15 years of age, give dose #2 at 16-18 years of age^a
- If dose #1 is delayed until 16 years of age or older,^b dose #2 is not recommended

^a The minimum interval between doses of MCV4 is 8 weeks. Thus, it is possible to give the first dose at 15 and the second dose at 16 years of age, as long as the minimum 8-week interval between doses is observed.

^b Routine MCV4 vaccination of healthy persons who are not at increased risk for exposure to *Neisseria meningitidis* is not recommended after 21 years of age.

The second dose is vitally important because protection provided by the first dose can decrease in the 5 years after vaccination. So if a child receives the first dose of MCV4 at 11 years of age, he or she will need a booster at 16 years of age. In fact, the period from 16-21 years of age is known to be a time of increased risk for meningococcal disease.

Although many colleges now require proof of meningococcal vaccination prior to admission, a second dose is recommended for adolescents at 16 years of age whether or not they are planning on attending college.

Please ask your health care provider about MCV4. He or she will be able to answer any questions you may have about meningococcal disease, the importance of protection, and the need for 2 doses of vaccine.

Reference:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated recommendations for use of meningococcal conjugate vaccines: Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), 2010. *MMWR*. 2011;60(3):72-76.