

Queensland Meningococcal B (MenB) Vaccination Program

Consumer information sheet

Meningococcal disease is a rare but severe infection that occurs when meningococcal bacteria invade the body from the nose or throat.

Meningococcal bacteria are carried in the nose and throat of a small proportion of healthy people (about 10%) and are spread through close prolonged contact. The bacteria are more commonly found in teenagers and young adults. There are several different strains of meningococcal bacteria. Worldwide, the main strains that cause meningococcal disease are A, B, C, W and Y.

Most people with meningococcal infection fully recover, but some people can develop long-term health complications including limb deformity, skin scarring, deafness and brain damage.

The Queensland Meningococcal B Vaccination Program

Beginning in 2024, the Queensland MenB Vaccination Program provides free meningococcal B (menB) vaccine to eligible Queensland infants, children and adolescents.

MenB vaccine is recommended for these age groups as they are at increased risk of invasive meningococcal B disease.

The following Queenslanders are eligible for Queensland MenB Vaccination Program:

- Infants, 6 weeks to 12 months of age.
- Catch-up immunisation is offered for children aged over 12 months to less than 2 years of age who have not yet started or completed a course of immunisation with the menB vaccine Bexsero.
- Adolescents aged 15 to less than 20 years.

Once immunisation is commenced during the eligibility period, a person remains eligible for their second dose of the menB vaccine, regardless of their age.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (less than 2 years of age) and people with specific medical risk factors for invasive meningococcal disease have historically been and will continue to be eligible for free menB vaccine through the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

MenB vaccines are also available for purchase on the private market for those who are not eligible under the NIP or the Queensland MenB Vaccination Program.

Can my baby have the menB vaccine with the other scheduled immunisations?

MenB vaccine can be safely administered with other scheduled childhood vaccines and immunisations. The two primary doses of menB vaccine can be given at the same time as the standard NIP vaccines at 6 weeks and 4 months of age. The third dose (booster) can be given at the same time as the standard NIP 12month vaccines.

MenB vaccine can also be administered at the same time as the Queensland RSV program immunisation nirsevimab.

Common side effects following menB immunisation

Common side effects following menB immunisation include:

- Fever
- Pain
- Redness, swelling or a nodule (small hard lump) at the injection site
- Irritability
- Sleepiness
- Unusual crying and change in appetite
- Headache and feeling unwell (more commonly reported among adolescents and young adults).

Talk to your immunisation provider or call 13HEALTH for information about these possible reactions and how to manage them.

If you are concerned about your child's reaction to the menB vaccine, please seek medical advice.

Why is paracetamol recommended for children less than 2 years of age before and after receiving menB vaccine?

Recommended paracetamol doses (amount based on child's weight):

Paracetamol Dose 1 – prior to immunisation or as soon as possible after the menB vaccine

Paracetamol Dose 2 – six hours after dose 1

Paracetamol Dose 3 – six hours after dose 2

If a child develops a fever which is not adequately controlled following these recommendations, seek medical advice.

Where can I go to be immunised?

MenB immunisation is available through a network of more than 2,000 Queensland Health Immunisation Program registered immunisation service providers, including GPs, pharmacies, community immunisation clinics, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services.

MenB immunisation is also delivered in Year 10 through the Queensland School Immunisation Program.

MenB vaccine safety

All vaccines and immunisation products used in Australia have been extensively tested for safety. Before any vaccine or immunisation product can be used in Australia it must be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA uses scientific evidence on each vaccine and immunisation product to assess safety and effectiveness.

MenB vaccine can be safely administered with other scheduled childhood vaccines.

MenB vaccine and pregnancy

The MenB vaccine is not routinely recommended during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. However, the menB vaccine can be given if your GP recommends it. This may be if you are at particular risk of meningococcal B disease. Relevant age groups will be asked if they are pregnant before receiving the vaccine.

Is menB vaccine included in the requirements under the Commonwealth Government's 'No Jab No Pay' or the Queensland Government's 'No Jab no Play' policies?

Funded MenB vaccine is not assessed as part of the eligibility requirements for family assistance payments under the Commonwealth Government's 'No Jab No Pay' policy, or the Queensland Government's immunisation legislation for early childhood education and care services.

What is funded/free?

The menB vaccine (Bexsero) is provided for free to eligible people. A consultation/administration fee may be charged to people at the immunisation service provider's discretion.

I paid for MenB vaccines for my child previously. Do they need to have any more doses now they are in Year 10?

If your child has already received a valid and complete meningococcal B immunisation course with Bexsero vaccine, there is no current recommendation to repeat the course - however they remain eligible to receive a funded menB immunisation course when aged between 15 and less than 20 years.

A menB immunisation course can be repeated as long as the interval between courses is at least 8 weeks. Please discuss your child's immunisation needs with your healthcare provider.

Can people who are not eligible for Medicare be provided with Queensland funded menB vaccines?

No. Eligibility for the Queensland MenB Vaccination Program is linked to the eligibility for Medicare benefits.

Note, refugees and humanitarian entrants settled in Queensland are Medicare eligible and are therefore eligible to be vaccinated under this program.

Can visitors to Queensland be provided with Queensland funded menB vaccines?

No. The Queensland MenB Vaccination Program is for residents of Queensland who are Medicare eligible.

Can I be reimbursed if I have already paid for a menB immunisation?

No. Reimbursement is not available to those who accessed menB immunisation prior to the commencement of the program.

Why is the Queensland Government funding a Queensland MenB Vaccination Program?

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection that can cause significant illness, disability and death. Around one-third of children and adolescents who survive meningococcal disease develop permanent complications. With improved control of other strains of meningococcal disease through immunisation, the menB strain is emerging as the most common cause of illness and death from meningococcal disease in Queensland.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends menB immunisation for several at risk groups, in addition to those currently included under the NIP schedule. The implementation of a Queensland funded menB vaccination program for children and adolescents aligns with ATAGI's recommendations. The Queensland MenB Vaccination Program aims to remove financial barriers to immunisation, improve vaccine uptake, and improve the protection that menB immunisation provides against meningococcal disease.

Does the MenB vaccine offer any other benefits?

Yes. The MenB vaccine has also shown effectiveness in preventing gonorrhoea amongst adolescent and young adults. This is because gonorrhoea and meningococcal B are caused by similar types of bacteria.