

Meningococcal Disease Vaccine

Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection caused by the bacterium **Neisseria meningitidis**. It can lead to life-threatening conditions like **meningitis** (inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord) or **septicemia** (blood poisoning). This infection can spread quickly, and without treatment, it can result in serious complications or even death. Thankfully, a **meningococcal vaccine** can help protect you from this dangerous disease.

What is Meningococcal Disease?

Meningococcal disease occurs when the **Neisseria meningitidis** bacteria infect the bloodstream or the brain. There are several strains (or serogroups) of the bacteria, with **A, B, C, W, and Y** being the most common ones that cause disease worldwide. Symptoms of meningococcal disease include:

- **Severe headache**
- **Fever**
- **Stiff neck**
- **Nausea and vomiting**
- **Sensitivity to light**
- **Confusion or drowsiness**

In the case of septicemia, symptoms include cold hands and feet, rapid breathing, and a dark purple rash. Meningococcal disease can progress quickly and requires urgent medical attention. Even with treatment, it can cause long-term disabilities such as hearing loss, brain damage, or loss of limbs.

How is Meningococcal Disease Spread?

Meningococcal disease is spread through **close contact** with an infected person, typically through saliva or respiratory droplets. This means it can spread through coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing items like utensils or drinks.

People who live in close quarters, such as **university students** in dormitories, **military recruits**, or those in crowded conditions, are at a higher risk of infection. The disease can affect people of all ages but is more common in infants, adolescents, and young adults.

Brought to you by **Cipla**

**Cipla supports health literacy through sponsorship. Content is independently created and managed by Medinforme.*

Why is the Meningococcal Vaccine Important?

The **meningococcal vaccine** provides effective protection against the most common strains of **Neisseria meningitidis**. Vaccination is especially important because meningococcal disease can develop rapidly, sometimes within hours, and can be fatal in up to 10% of cases even with treatment.

In South Africa, the vaccine is recommended for:

- **Children under 2 years old**
- **Adolescents and young adults**, especially those living in group settings like boarding schools or universities.
- **Travellers** to countries where meningococcal disease is more common, such as those in the African meningitis belt (from Senegal to Ethiopia).
- **People with weakened immune systems** or certain medical conditions that put them at higher risk of infection.

Types of Meningococcal Vaccines

There are different types of meningococcal vaccines available to protect against various strains of the bacteria:

1. **Meningococcal conjugate vaccines (MCV4)**: These protect against four major serogroups: A, C, W, and Y. It is commonly recommended for adolescents and young adults.
2. **Meningococcal B vaccine (MenB)**: This vaccine protects against **serogroup B**, which is responsible for many cases of meningococcal disease, especially in young children and adolescents.

Vaccination schedules can vary depending on age and risk factors. In South Africa, the **Department of Health** recommends that individuals in high-risk groups, such as young children, adolescents, and people traveling to high-risk areas, consider getting vaccinated.

How Safe is the Meningococcal Vaccine?

The **meningococcal vaccine** is safe and effective. Millions of people around the world have been vaccinated, and serious side effects are very rare. The most common side effects are mild and include:

- **Soreness** at the injection site
- **Mild fever**
- **Fatigue**

These side effects usually go away within a day or two. The risk of serious side effects is much lower than the risk of complications from meningococcal disease itself.

References:

1. [South African Department of Health](#)



Published and distributed by Mediaforum.
This content is protected in terms of the Copyright Act 98 of 1978.