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VACCINE INFORMATION STATEMENT

Meningococcal Vaccines

What You Need to Know

Using Vaccine Information Statements as models for vaccine labels helps you make informed decisions regarding an option to protect your health. Visit www.fda.gov/vaccines.

1 What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial illness. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 through 18 years old in the United States. Meningitis is an infection of the covering of the brain and the spinal cord.

Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections.

About 1,000-1,200 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S. Even when they are treated with antibiotics, 10-15% of these people die. Of those who live, another 11%-19% lose their arms or legs, have problems with their nervous systems, become deaf, or suffer seizures or strokes.

Anyone can get meningococcal disease. But it is most common in infants less than one year of age and people 16-23 years. Children with certain medical conditions, such as lack of a spleen, have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease. College freshmen living in dorms are also at increased risk.

Meningococcal infections can be treated with drugs such as penicillin. Still, many people who get the disease die from it, and many others are affected for life. This is why preventing the disease through use of meningococcal vaccine is important for people at highest risk.

2 Meningococcal vaccine

There are two kinds of meningococcal vaccine in the U.S.:

- Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) is the preferred vaccine for people 11 years of age and younger.
- Meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (MPSV4) has been available since the 1970s. It is the only meningococcal vaccine licensed for people older than 15.

Both vaccines can prevent 4 types of meningococcal disease, including 2 of the 3 types most common in the United States and a type that causes epidemics in Africa. There are other types of meningococcal disease; the vaccines do not protect against these.

3 Who should get meningococcal vaccine and when?

Routine vaccination

Two doses of MCV4 are recommended for adolescents 11 through 18 years of age: the first dose at 11 or 12 years of age, with a booster dose at age 16.

Adolescents in this age group with HIV infection should get three doses: 2 doses 2 months apart at 11 or 12 years, plus a booster at age 16.

If the first dose (or series) is given between 11 and 13 years of age, the booster should be given between 16 and 18. If the first dose (or series) is given after the 16th birthday, a booster is not needed.

Other people at increased risk

- College freshmen living in dormitories.
- Laboratory personnel who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria.
- U.S. military recruits.
- Anyone traveling to, or living in, a part of the world where meningococcal disease is common, such as parts of Africa.
- Anyone who has a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed.
- Anyone who has persistent complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder).
- People who might have been exposed to meningitis during an outbreak.

Children between 9 and 23 months of age, and anyone else with certain medical conditions need 2 doses for adequate protection. Ask your doctor about the number and timing of doses, and the need for booster doses.

MCV4 is the preferred vaccine for people in these groups who are 9 months through 11 years of age. MPSV4 can be used for adults older than 15.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention