

Free Meningococcal B Immunisation Program: What you need to know

Do you have a child (or maybe more?) aged less than four years? If you said yes, they can receive a FREE meningococcal B vaccination. If you have children older than this, they can still receive the vaccination, but you will need to talk to your immunisation provider about purchasing a vaccine.

Here is everything you need to know about the FREE Meningococcal B Immunisation Program.

Young children, particularly those less than two years, have the highest rate of invasive meningococcal B disease. The second highest at risk group are those aged 15-20 years of age. For this reason, the South Australian Government has introduced a free Meningococcal B Immunisation Program to provide vaccinations for some children and young people. Primary school aged children (older than four years) will be offered the vaccine in Year 10 of high school.

To receive the free vaccine, children and young people must live in SA, have a Medicare card and be in one of the below groups:

- > Babies aged 6 weeks to 12 months will be vaccinated through the childhood program, which began on 1 October 2018. This program is ongoing and will be given to babies with other vaccines from the immunisation schedule.
- > Children aged 12 months to less than four years at the start of the program, can be vaccinated through the childhood catch-up program. The childhood catch-up program began on 1 October 2018 and will end on **31 December 2019**.
- > The young person's program will begin on 1 February 2019. Students in Years 10 and 11 will be offered vaccination during the 2019 School Immunisation Program. The Year 10 program will be ongoing through the School Immunisation Program. The catch-up program for Year 11 students will end on **31 December 2019**.
- > Young adults aged 17 to less than 21 can receive vaccinations through a catch-up program available from most immunisation providers. This catch-up program will **end 31 December 2019**.

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection caused by meningococcal bacteria. It can affect all age groups but is most common in children under five years of age and in young people aged 15 to 20 years. There are several strains (types) of meningococcal, however, the B strain is the most common in South Australia and is now included as part of the ongoing immunisation schedule for children less than 12 months of age, and adolescents in South Australia.

What vaccine is used? Is it safe?

The meningococcal B vaccine used for this program is called Bexsero®. This vaccine has been used in many countries and is included on the childhood immunisation program in the United Kingdom. Babies less than 12 months of age will need a total of three doses. Children older than 12 months will only need two doses.

Bexsero can safely be given with other recommended vaccines listed on the National Immunisation Program. In the childhood program, Bexsero is recommended at 6 weeks, 4 months and 12 months of age. All vaccines used in Australia have been extensively tested for safety. Before any vaccine can be used in Australia it must be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA uses scientific evidence on each vaccine to assess safety and effectiveness. Bexsero can be safely administered with other scheduled childhood vaccines.

What do I need to know before the vaccination?

It is important to know that children less than two years of age are recommended to receive paracetamol before and after they receive a dose of Bexsero. Fever is a common reaction following any vaccine, but it is more common in children less than two years of age when Bexsero is given with other vaccines.

The first dose of paracetamol should be given 30 minutes before the immunisation, or as soon as practical after the immunisation. After the vaccination it is also recommended that a further two doses of paracetamol are given. Paracetamol will reduce the likelihood of high-grade fever for children less than two years of age. Your immunisation provider will explain what to expect following immunisation and what to do.

Where can my child receive the vaccine?

The meningococcal B vaccine is available through most immunisation providers (doctor, local council immunisation clinics, and some community health centres). Students in Year 10 and 11 will receive the vaccination at school through the School Immunisation Program.

Quick facts about meningococcal disease:

- > Some people may carry the bacteria in the nose and throat without developing the disease (carriers).
- > The bacteria can spread when a carrier, or infected person, talks, coughs or sneezes infectious droplets into the air, or through close contact with contaminated nose and throat secretions.
- > Invasive meningococcal disease occurs when the bacteria “invade” the body from the nose and throat.
- > Although relatively rare, it is a serious infection and can be life threatening.
- > In Australia, 5-10% of people with invasive meningococcal disease die, even with rapid treatment.
- > Up to 30% of children and adolescents who survive the disease will have permanent complications including limb deformity, deafness, skin scarring, learning difficulties and problems with memory and coordination.

For more information speak to your immunisation provider or visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/menbprogram and access the Frequently Asked Questions for Parents. You can also contact the Immunisation Section, SA Health on 1300 232 272.



For more information

Immunisation Section
Communicable Disease Control Branch
Address Line 1
Address
Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/menbprogram

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