

Free Meningococcal B Immunisation Program: What you need to know

Is your child in Year 10 or 11? Are you in Year 10, Year 11 or aged 17 to 20? If you said yes, here is everything you need to know about the FREE Meningococcal B Immunisation Program.

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 15 to 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.

The young person's program will begin on 1 February 2019. To receive the free vaccine, young people must live in SA, have a Medicare card and be in one of the below groups:

- > 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 years can receive vaccinations through a catch-up program available from most immunisation providers. This catch-up program will end **31 December 2019**.

You might also have younger children in your family. They are also eligible to receive the free vaccine if they live in SA, have a Medicare card and are in the following age 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**.

There are several strains (types) of meningococcal; however, the B strain is the most common in South Australia.

There is also a vaccine to cover another four strains (A, C, W and Y). This vaccine will be available for free to adolescents and young people from April 2019 and will be part of the School Immunisation Program for Year 10 students.

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. Any person older than 12 months will only need two doses, but babies less than 12 months of age will need a total of three doses.

Bexsero can safely be given with other recommended vaccines listed on the National Immunisation Program. 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.

Where can I receive the vaccine?

Students in Years 10 and 11 will receive an information pack to take home as part of the School Immunisation Program. The pack includes information about the disease and the vaccine and a consent card to receive the vaccine at school.

The meningococcal B vaccine is also available through most immunisation providers (doctor, local council immunisation clinics, and some community health centres).

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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