

Meningococcal Vaccine for Preteens and Teens

Last updated March 2012

Why does my child need MCV4 vaccine?

The meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV4) protects against 4 types of meningococcal disease, an infection that doesn't happen very often, but can be very dangerous when it does. Meningococcal meningitis is a bacterial infection that can make the lining of the brain and spinal cord swell. This can cause brain damage, hearing loss, and learning problems. The meningococcal bacteria can also cause sepsis, which is an infection in the blood. This infection can lead to the loss of an arm, leg or other parts of the body. Even if they get treatment, about 1 in 10 people with meningococcal disease will die from it.

Meningococcal disease can spread from person to person. The bacteria that cause this infection can spread when people have close or lengthy contact with someone's saliva, like through kissing or coughing, especially if they are living in the same place. Teens and young adults have a higher risk for meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease can become very serious, very quickly. The MCV4 shot is the best way to protect teens from getting meningococcal disease.

When should my child be vaccinated?

Teens are at higher risk of getting meningococcal disease. Preteens should get the first MCV4 shot when they are 11 or 12 years old, before they become teens and their risk is higher. Older teens need a booster shot when they are 16 years old, so they stay protected when their risk is the highest.

Teens who got MCV4 for the first time when were 13, 14 or 15 years old should still get the booster shot when they are

16 years old. If your older teens didn't get an MCV4 shot at all, talk to their doctor about getting it as soon as possible. This is really important if they are about to move into a college dorm or go into the military.

What else should I know about the vaccine?

MCV4 has been studied very carefully and is safe and effective. It is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.

Like many vaccines, MCV4 may cause mild side effects, like redness and soreness where the shot was given (usually in the arm). A few people who get the vaccine will get a fever. Some preteens and teens might faint after getting MCV4 or any shot. Sitting or lying down to get the shot and then for about 15 minutes after the shot, can help avoid fainting. Serious side effects from MCV4 are rare.

How can I get help paying for these vaccines?

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger, who are not insured or under-insured, Medicaid-eligible, American Indian or Alaska Native. You can find out more about the VFC program by going online to www.cdc.gov and typing VFC in the search box.

Where can I learn more?

Talk to your child's doctor or nurse to learn more about MCV4 and the other vaccines that your child may need. You can also find out more about these vaccines on CDC's Vaccines for Preteens and Teens website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens.



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