

# MENINGOCOCCAL



## Mass Vaccination Program – Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is meningococcal disease?**

Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious infectious disease.

Symptoms include fever, severe aches and pains, headache, drowsiness and confusion. Infants can be distressed, limp, pale and feed poorly. A rash may appear as the disease progresses.

People with meningococcal disease often go from feeling well to extremely unwell very quickly.

### **How common is meningococcal disease?**

Tasmania typically has about five cases of meningococcal disease a year, in our population of over 500,000.

In 2018 there were no meningococcal disease cases in the first six months.

Then there were five cases in July. Four of the five cases were meningococcal W, and three of these cases were from the Hobart suburbs of New Town, Moonah and Glenorchy.

Because of this cluster of cases, we are treating this as an outbreak and taking action to prevent further cases.

### **What are you doing about it?**

The Department of Health is offering free vaccine to everyone living in Tasmania born after 1 August 1997, and at least 6 weeks old. This is around 100 000 people.

This is a large immunisation program that needs careful planning and preparation.

Our first priority is to quickly protect those in the target age group who live, work or go to school in the New Town, Moonah and Glenorchy areas. This is where three of the four recent Meningococcal W cases were from.

We are also extending this response to offer the Meningococcal ACWY vaccine to young Tasmanians throughout the state, and are planning to achieve this over the next three months.

These actions will provide a high level of protection against Meningococcal A, C, W and Y strains for the next four or more years.

## **How are you protecting people in the Glenorchy, Moonah and New Town areas?**

We are holding free immunisation clinics at the Derwent Entertainment Centre, in partnership with the Glenorchy City Council. These clinics will be held over the weekends of 4–5 August and 18–19 August. We will offer over 4 000 immunisation over *each* weekend.

Around 5,000 infants, children and teenagers live in these three suburbs.

We have also delivered vaccines to GPs in the area. We're providing additional training to pharmacists in early August, so they contribute to the response by giving meningococcal ACWY vaccine to children aged 10 years and over.

## **Which strains of meningococcal disease does the vaccine cover?**

The free vaccine covers the meningococcal strains A, C, W and Y. Four of the recent cases were the W. In 2018 so far, and for most of 2017, Tasmania has had the highest rate of Meningococcal W disease in Australia.

## **When will vaccine be available to people living outside the Glenorchy, Moonah and New Town areas**

Around 90,000 additional doses of meningococcal ACWY vaccines have been purchased for this response, and are being distributed to GPs. GPs will manage their bookings to provide vaccines to eligible Tasmanians either through individual consultations, or sessions devoted to vaccination. Many will currently have a waiting list, but there is sufficient vaccine for eligible persons to receive vaccine from GPs over the next several months.

We're also providing additional training to pharmacists so they can give the vaccine to children aged 10 years and over. From mid-August 2018, 10 to 21 year-olds eligible for a free vaccine will be able to get it from many local pharmacists. We expect pharmacists to be important partners in this response.

Some local Councils will also provide immunisation clinics.

## **Who is eligible for a free meningococcal vaccine?**

All Tasmanians born after 1 August 1997 and at least six weeks old are eligible for a free vaccine.

## **Why are free vaccines limited to this age group?**

Young children and older teenagers are at higher risk of catching meningococcal disease. Teenagers are more likely to carry meningococcal bacteria in their throat or nose and spread the bacteria to others in the community. Immunising this wide group of Tasmanians will protect them and help reduce the spread of the disease in the wider population.

## **Is this vaccine different to the meningococcal vaccination my teenager had recently at school?**

No. You may have consented to your child born between 1 August 1997 and 30 April 2003 receiving the meningococcal ACWY ('Men W') vaccine through the school-based meningococcal immunisation program in late 2017 and early 2018. If you know they received that vaccine, they don't need to be immunised again.

This only applies to children.

If your teenager did not get the vaccine through the 2017–2018 program, they are still eligible for a free meningococcal ACWY vaccine, along with all person born after 1 August 1997 and at least 6 weeks old.

**My one year-old got a free meningococcal vaccine. Is this the same?**

From 1 July 2018, one-year-olds have received a meningococcal ACWY ('Men W') vaccine through the routine immunisation program. They do not need a second meningococcal ACWY vaccine.

Children who turned one before 1 July 2018 will have received a meningococcal C vaccine (combined with Hib). This vaccine provided protection against the now-rare C strain. They are eligible for the 4-strain ACWY vaccine being provided through this new program.

**Why isn't there are free vaccine for the B strain?**

For now, the most important thing is to protect people against the W strain of meningococcal. This strain has caused all but one recent case in Tasmania and currently poses the greatest risk.

**I've already paid privately for a Meningococcal ACWY vaccine. Can I get a refund?**

No. Funding provided by the Tasmanian Government is only for purchase of vaccines, not for reimbursement.

**Is immunisation compulsory?**

No. You can choose not to get immunised, but we recommend every Tasmanian resident born after 1 August 1997 and at least 6 weeks old get immunised to protect themselves and help prevent the spread of meningococcal disease within our community. Meningococcal disease is serious. Immunisation is the best protection.

**Other than age, are there risk factors for catching meningococcal disease?**

Smokers and people who have been exposed to cigarette smoke are at increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.

Some medical conditions that affect the immune system can also increase the risk. Children with impaired immunity need an extra dose of the vaccine.

**What should I do if I think I or someone I care for has meningococcal disease?**

Seek emergency medical treatment immediately.

Call your GP, HealthDirect (available 24 hours, phone 1800 022 222) or go to an Emergency Department.

## **Where can I find more information about immunisation and meningococcal disease?**

### Meningococcal Disease:

- DHHS Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet:  
[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable\\_diseases\\_prevention\\_unit/infectious\\_diseases/meningococcal\\_disease](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/infectious_diseases/meningococcal_disease)
- Australian Government Department of Health – Meningococcal W Disease:  
[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-meningococcal-W.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-meningococcal-W.htm)

### Meningococcal Vaccines:

- The Australian Immunisation Handbook – Meningococcal Disease:  
[www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/HandbookI0-home~handbookI0part4~handbookI0-4-I0](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/HandbookI0-home~handbookI0part4~handbookI0-4-I0)
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance- Meningococcal Vaccines Fact Sheet: [www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider\\_resources/fact-sheets/meningococcal-vaccines-fact-sheet.pdf](http://www.ncirs.edu.au/assets/provider_resources/fact-sheets/meningococcal-vaccines-fact-sheet.pdf)

### Tasmanian Meningococcal W Program:

- [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/menw](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/menw)

### Council Immunisation Clinics

- [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable\\_diseases\\_prevention\\_unit/immunisation/school\\_based\\_immunisation\\_program/council\\_vaccination\\_sessions](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/communicable_diseases_prevention_unit/immunisation/school_based_immunisation_program/council_vaccination_sessions)