

Meningococcal Vaccine

Benefits

Protects against infections by meningococcus, which can cause nausea, vomiting, fever, headache, altered mental status, permanent hearing loss, brain damage, and death. The disease can have a very rapid onset, and in some cases can cause death within just a few hours. 1 in 20 people who get meningitis will die from the disease.

Keeps others safe: some people cannot get vaccines due to allergies or other issues.

Side effects

1 in 2 children will have mild side effects such as redness or soreness where the shot was given lasting 1-2 days. About 1 in 50 children will develop a low-grade fever lasting 1-2 days. Fewer than 1 in a million have an allergic reaction to the vaccine.

Concerns

Can the meningococcal vaccine cause meningitis?

No. The vaccine only contains a dead part of the meningococcal bacteria. This helps the body recognize and fight meningococcal infection in the future, but it cannot cause the disease.

I've heard the meningococcal vaccine doesn't protect against all forms of meningitis. Is that true?

The meningococcal vaccine protects against 3 of the most common strains of meningitis, as well as a fourth type which is more common abroad. Since the strains it protects against are more common in adolescents, it's recommended that the vaccine be given first at 11 or 12 years of age unless there are special circumstances.

Does the meningococcal vaccine contain aluminum, formaldehyde, mercury, or thimerosal?

The meningococcal vaccine does not contain aluminum. The vaccine contains a very small amount of formaldehyde. This is a naturally occurring substance, and children have several times more formaldehyde than that circulating in their bloodstream. Most versions of the meningococcal vaccine do not contain mercury or thimerosal, though the Menomune vaccine contains trace amounts of both.

Where does the meningococcal vaccine come from?

The meningococcal vaccine is produced from bacterial cell cultures, which are killed with formaldehyde so they are unable to cause infection.

Do any of the sources used in this handout have ties to pharmaceutical companies?

The sources used for this handout are the Center for Disease Control (CDC), immunize.org, and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHoP). While some employees at the CDC, immunize.org, and CHoP have ties to

pharmaceutical companies, those organizations are up-front about these connections. The CDC in particular took steps in 2006 to make its vaccine recommendation unit more independent and less subject to bias.

References:

<http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/symptoms.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm#mening>

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/meningococcal/collegefact.html>

<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4210.pdf>

<http://www.cdc.gov/Vaccines/vpd-vac/mening/who-vaccinate.htm>

<http://www.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/a-look-at-each-vaccine/meningococcus-vaccine.html>

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