

# Meningococcal Disease

## What Families Need to Know

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. It can spread from person to person through close contact with someone's saliva (spit) - through kissing, when someone coughs, or by sharing items like utensils, cups or toothbrushes. Meningococcal disease can spread easier in crowded living spaces. Illness from meningococcal disease can become serious or even deadly in a very short amount of time.



## How to Protect Children from Meningococcal Disease

Thankfully, there are vaccines that protect people from the most common types of *Neisseria meningitidis* bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Usually, meningococcal vaccines are not given until someone is between 10-12 years old. Some children 2 months to 10 years old should be vaccinated if they have certain immune system medical conditions, take certain medications, or are planning travel to certain countries. Please discuss vaccination with your child's healthcare provider.

## Meningococcal Outbreaks

An outbreak of meningococcal disease means that there are more people becoming ill with this disease than normal during a short period of time and there is a connection between the people getting sick.

When there is a meningococcal outbreak, a meningococcal vaccine can be given earlier than normally recommended to protect a child. If a child is vaccinated early, they will still need to receive the regular series of meningococcal vaccines when they are older. Talk to your child's doctor or see how to contact the Chicago Department of Public Health at [chicago.gov/vax](http://chicago.gov/vax) about whether your child should receive a meningococcal vaccination during an outbreak.

## Types of Meningococcal Vaccines

- Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY): Recommended for all children between 11 and 12 years old and a booster dose is given at 16 years old. If a child gets their first dose at or after 16, they do not need a booster. Also recommended for anyone age 2 months or older with certain immune system medical conditions.
- Meningococcal B vaccine (MenB): Recommended for children 10 years and older who are at increased risk for meningococcal B infection. Anyone 16 through 23 years of age can also choose to get the vaccine.