



MotherToBaby

Medications & More During Pregnancy & Breastfeeding
Ask The Experts

Fact Sheet

by the **Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS)**

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Meningococcal Disease (Bacterial Meningitis) Vaccine

This sheet talks about exposure to meningococcal disease or meningococcal vaccine in a pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis can be caused by viruses, bacteria, fungus, or parasites. The seriousness of the illness and treatment differs depending on the type of meningitis. Bacterial meningitis is usually a very severe condition but there are vaccines to help prevent some kinds of bacterial meningitis.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease can include a sudden onset of headache, fever, and stiff neck. A person may also seem confused or have increased sensitivity to light. Even with appropriate antibiotic treatment, meningococcal disease can cause death or result in life-long disability. Fortunately, meningococcal disease is not common and preventative vaccines are available.

Is bacterial meningitis contagious?

Yes. While bacterial meningitis is not as contagious as a cold or the flu, it can be passed on through contact with a sick person's saliva or spit. For example, it can be passed from person to person through coughing or kissing. Individuals living close together, like students in a college dorm, are at increased risk for getting bacterial meningitis.

What is the meningococcal vaccine?

The meningococcal vaccine provides protection against the common types of bacterial meningitis. These vaccines are divided into three categories: the meningococcal conjugate vaccines or MCV4 for short (brand names include Menveo® and Menactra®), the meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine or MPSV4 for short (brand name: Menomune®), and the MenB/serogroup B meningococcal vaccines (brand names: Bexsero® and Trumenba®).

The MCV4 and MPSV4 vaccines protect against four types of meningococcal disease (A/C/Y and W-135), giving high but not 100% protection, and the MenB protects against the B strain. The vaccines are noninfectious and cannot give a person bacterial meningitis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that pregnancy should not preclude vaccination with MCV4 or MPSV4 vaccine, but the MenB vaccine should be deferred in pregnant and breastfeeding women unless the women are for some reason at increased risk from the infection. This is because there is limited data on use of Men B vaccines in this population. Individuals who did not receive a meningococcal vaccination during their teenage years may be recommended to get the vaccine based on their work, travel, or health conditions.

I just got the meningococcal vaccine. How long should I wait until I get pregnant?

Since the meningococcal vaccine is noninfectious, there is no recommended waiting period before attempting to get pregnant.

I didn't know I was pregnant when I got the meningococcal vaccine; is there a risk to my baby?

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk.

Noninfectious vaccines in general are considered to be a low risk during pregnancy. Specific to the meningococcal vaccines, six studies that included 335 women who received the older MPSV type vaccines during pregnancy found no related harmful effects. Most of these women were vaccinated after the first trimester.

Voluntary reports to a vaccine database also found no unusual pattern of outcomes in 103 reports about pregnancies with the Menactra type MCV4 vaccine exposure. This vaccine had been most often given in the first trimester in these reports. Additional studies are being done to confirm the initial reassuring information.

There is an outbreak of meningococcal disease in my area. Should I get the vaccine even though I am pregnant?

Meningococcal disease is a very serious condition. If you are at risk to get the disease, it is recommended that you get the vaccine, regardless of whether or not you are pregnant. There is some evidence from studies done in areas with prevalent meningococcal disease like Bangladesh, Brazil, and Gambia that immunization of pregnant women provides some short term protection for their newborns from the disease.

Can I receive the meningococcal vaccine while breastfeeding?

Yes. Noninfectious vaccines like the meningococcal vaccine are compatible with breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all your choices for breastfeeding.

The father of the baby received the meningococcal vaccine around the time that I got pregnant. Is there a risk to the baby?

No. In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet *Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy* at <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/>.

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