Meningococcal Disease (Bacterial Meningitis) Vaccine

This sheet talks about exposure to 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.

Symptoms of meningococcal disease can include a sudden onset of headache, fever, and stiff neck. A person may also seem confused, have increased sensitivity to light, or develop a rash. Even with appropriate antibiotic treatment, meningococcal disease can cause death or result in life-long disability. Bacterial meningitis is usually a very severe condition but there are vaccines to help prevent catching some kinds of bacterial meningitis.

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 vaccines provide protection against some of the meningococcal bacteria that cause disease. The meningococcal vaccines help to protect people from types A, B, C, W, and Y. The vaccines are noninfectious, which means they cannot give a person bacterial meningitis.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that pregnancy should not prevent vaccination with the vaccine that protects against types ACWY (called MenACWY for short), but the MenB vaccine should be postponed until after pregnancy and breastfeeding unless there is a significant chance for infection. This is because there is limited data on use of MenB vaccines during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

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. Please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet on vaccines for more general information: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/vaccines-pregnancy/.

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 received the meningococcal vaccine. Can it make it harder for me to become pregnant?

Based on the data available, there is no indication that receiving the meningococcal vaccine can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having/getting the meningococcal vaccine increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. While the data is limited, reviews from reports of vaccination during pregnancy does not suggest an increased chance of miscarriage with meningococcal vaccine.

Does having/getting a meningococcal vaccine increase the risk of birth defects?

In every pregnancy, there is a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Noninfectious vaccines in general are considered to be a low risk during pregnancy. There have been no controlled trials done to assess the safety of MenACWY type vaccines during pregnancy. While the current data is limited, an increased chance of birth defects have not been observed beyond the background risk.

Would having/getting the meningococcal vaccine cause pregnancy complications?
The available data does not suggest that meningococcal vaccine would increase the chance of pregnancy complications. One study did not find difference in the rates of outcomes between those who were vaccinated with MenA conjugate vaccine and those who were not in regards to miscarriage, premature birth (before 37 weeks), low birth weight (less than 5lbs 5oz), small for gestational age (smaller in size than normal), C-sections or still birth.

*Does getting the meningococcal vaccine in pregnancy cause long-term problems?*

There are no controlled studies regarding meningococcal vaccine and long-term problems in children exposed during a pregnancy.

*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 widespread meningococcal disease like Bangladesh, Brazil, and Gambia that immunization during pregnancy provides some short-term protection for their newborns from the disease. Talk with your healthcare providers about this vaccine if there has been an outbreak.

*Can I receive the meningococcal vaccine while breastfeeding?*

Noninfectious vaccines like the meningococcal vaccine have been given to people who are nursing children. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about your breastfeeding questions.

*I had the meningococcal vaccine. Can it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?*

In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risk to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.