Meningococcal Vaccines

This sheet is about exposure to meningococcal vaccines in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is an illness caused by bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. It can cause meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord) and meningococcemia (infections of the blood). 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, experience nausea and/or vomiting, or develop a rash. If you think you have a meningococcal disease, it is important to get appropriate care as soon as possible.

There are two main types of meningitis: viral meningitis and bacterial meningitis. Several types of bacteria can cause bacterial meningitis, such as *Neisseria meningitidis, Streptococcus pneumoniae,* Group B *Streptococcus, Haemophilus influenzae, Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Escherichia coli*. MotherToBaby has fact sheet on some of these bacteria:

- Group B Strep Infections: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/group-b-strep-gbs-infections/
- Listeria Infection: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/listeriosis-pregnancy/
- Escherichia coli: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/e-coli-pregnancy/

Bacterial meningitis can be passed through contact with a sick person's saliva or spit (such as through coughing or kissing). Factors such as where people work, live, and travel can increase the chance for meningococcal disease. For example, people who live together in groups (such as people in the military or students who live in a dormitory setting) are at increased risk.

What are meningococcal vaccines?

Meningococcal vaccines provide protection against some of the meningococcal bacteria that cause disease. These vaccines do not contain live bacteria that could cause meningococcal disease. There are 3 types of meningococcal vaccines used in the United States:

- Meningococcal conjugate or MenACWY vaccines (Menveo®, and MenQuadfi®), which help protect against bacteria that cause meningococcal disease: A, C, W, and Y.
- Serogroup B meningococcal or MenB vaccines (Bexsero® and Trumenba®), which help protect against bacteria that cause meningococcal disease: B.
- Pentavalent or MenABCWY vaccine (Penbraya™), which help protect against bacteria that cause meningococcal disease: A, B, C, W, and Y.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that women who are pregnant and who are at increased risk for serogroup A, C, W, or Y meningococcal disease may get MenACWY vaccines.

The CDC states that MenB vaccines should be postponed in women known to be pregnant unless they are at increased risk for serogroup B meningococcal disease. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about your risk for meningococcal disease and the benefits of getting a vaccine.

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

Meningococcal disease is a very serious condition. If someone is at risk to get the disease it is recommended that they get the vaccine, whether they are pregnant or not. Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk of meningococcal disease and getting a meningococcal vaccine.

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

The meningococcal vaccines do not contain live bacteria that could cause meningococcal disease. There is no recommended waiting time after getting the vaccine before trying to get pregnant.

I received a meningococcal vaccine. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

There is no information to suggest that receiving a meningococcal vaccine can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does getting a meningococcal vaccine increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. While the data are limited, reviews of reports of vaccination during pregnancy do not suggest an increased chance of miscarriage from meningococcal vaccines.

Does getting a meningococcal vaccine increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like a meningococcal vaccine, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Available information does not suggest that getting a meningococcal vaccine during pregnancy can increase the chance of birth defects.

Does getting the meningococcal vaccine increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

One study did not find differences in pregnancy outcomes such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37), low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth), being small for gestational age (smaller in size than usual), C-sections, or stillbirth between those who were vaccinated with MenA conjugate vaccine during pregnancy and those who were not vaccinated.

Does getting a meningococcal vaccine in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if getting a meningococcal vaccine can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding after getting a meningococcal vaccine:

The CDC states that women at increased risk for serogroup B meningococcal disease who are breastfeeding may get MenB vaccines. Women who are breastfeeding may get a MenABCWY vaccine if they are at increased risk for serogroup A, C, W, or Y meningococcal disease AND serogroup B meningococcal disease. Before getting either meningococcal vaccine while breastfeeding, women should talk to their healthcare provider to review the risks of meningococcal disease and the benefits of vaccination. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man gets a meningococcal vaccine, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if meningococcal vaccines could affect men’s fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks 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.