

# The meningococcal B vaccine is now free for adolescents ages 14-19

## Protecting your teenager against meningococcal B, a rare but serious bacterial disease.

The Northern Territory Government is rolling out a free meningococcal B vaccination program from January 2025, to protect those most at risk.

The meningococcal B vaccine will be free for:

- Infants, aged **6 weeks to 12 months**
- **Year 9** students
- Children aged **12 months to 2 years** and adolescents aged **15-19 years** (until 2027 as part of a catch up program)

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a rare but severe infection that occurs when meningococcal bacteria invades the body from the nose or throat through close prolonged contact. The disease can occur rapidly and may be difficult to diagnose early. The person carrying the bacteria is usually completely well.

Most people with meningococcal infection fully recover but some people can develop long-term health complications including limb deformity, skin scarring, deafness and brain damage. It is fatal in 5-10% of cases.

There are several different strains of meningococcal bacteria. The main strains that cause meningococcal disease are A, B, C, W and Y.

## Is my teenager eligible for the free meningococcal B vaccine?

Teenagers are at an increased risk of invasive meningococcal disease due to:

- Large gatherings
- Kissing with multiple partners
- Crowded living and sleeping situations

There is a current meningococcal ACWY vaccine which is part of the National Immunisation Program that teenagers in Year 9 receive, but this does not protect young people from the meningococcal B strain. From early 2025, students in Year 9 will now receive the meningococcal B vaccine, Bexsero®. The vaccine is given as **two doses** at least 8 weeks apart.



## Are there any side effects following the vaccine?

Common side effects following meningococcal B immunisation include:

- Fever
- Pain
- Redness, swelling or a nodule (small hard lump) at the injection site
- Sleepiness
- Headache and feeling unwell (more commonly reported among adolescents and young adults).

If you are concerned about your child's reaction to the meningococcal B vaccine, please seek medical advice.

## Where can my teenager go to be immunised?

From early 2025, the meningococcal B vaccine will be delivered in Year 9 to students through the NT School Immunisation Program. Students will receive two doses of the vaccine. A catch up vaccination program will provide students in Years 10-12 with the free vaccine until 2027.

It is important that you return your vaccination consent form to your school.

The vaccine will also be available from GPs, pharmacies, community care centres and remote health services.

## Does the vaccine offer any other benefits?

Yes. The meningococcal B vaccine has also shown effectiveness in preventing **gonorrhoea** amongst adolescent and young adults.

This is because gonorrhoea and meningococcal B are caused by similar types of bacteria.

For more information, visit the **NT Health website**.

Scan for more information

