

# The meningococcal B vaccine is now free for children aged 6 weeks to 2 years

## Protecting your baby 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 baby eligible for the free meningococcal B vaccine?

Infants and young people are at an increased risk of invasive meningococcal B disease.

There is a current meningococcal ACWY vaccine which is part of the National Immunisation Program that children at 12 months receive, but this does not protect babies from the meningococcal B strain. From early 2025, infants aged 6 weeks to 12 months will now receive the meningococcal B vaccine, Bexsero®.

Children aged over 12 months to less than 2 years of age are also eligible as part of a catch up program, until 2027.

If your child has already completed an immunisation course with the Bexsero® vaccine, there is no need to repeat the course.



# Can my child have the vaccine with the other scheduled immunisations?

The meningococcal B vaccine can be safely administered with other scheduled childhood vaccines as part of the standard National Immunisation Program, **from 6 weeks of age**. Children under 12 months will require **three** doses of the vaccine, while children over the age of 12 months will require **two** doses.

## 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
- Irritability
- Sleepiness
- Unusual crying and change in appetite
- Headache and feeling unwell (more commonly reported among adolescents and young adults).

## Why is paracetamol recommended for children less than 2 years of age when receiving the vaccine?

To reduce the risk of fever after the vaccine, paracetamol is recommended within 30 minutes before, or as soon as practicable after, receiving the vaccine. This is regardless of whether the child has a fever.

- Dose 1 – 30 minutes before vaccination or as soon as possible afterwards
- Dose 2 – 6 hours after the first paracetamol dose even if there is no fever
- Dose 3 – 6 hours after the second paracetamol dose even if there is no fever

If your child develops a fever which is not adequately controlled following these recommendations, seek medical advice.

## Where can I go to have my baby immunised?

Meningococcal B immunisation is available from GPs, pharmacies, community care centres and remote health services. For more information, visit the **NT Health website**.

Scan for more information

