

## **Meningococcal W vaccination programme: Questions and Answers**

### [Why are you doing a free vaccination programme for Meningococcal W in Northland?](#)

*There is a community outbreak of meningococcal W disease in Northland. We need to vaccinate people who are most likely to carry the disease and infect others, which will help to prevent the spread and manage this outbreak.*

### [Who are you going to vaccinate?](#)

*We will vaccinate children aged from 9 months to under 5 years and those aged 13 to under 20 years who are Northland residents.*

### [Why are you only targeting under 5s \(9 months to 4 years of age more exactly\) and 13 to under 20-year-olds?](#)

*We are targeting children under 5 because this is the population that is generally most affected by meningococcal disease. As a result, vaccinating this age group will protect them from getting meningococcal disease. The vaccine cannot be given to babies under 9 months.*

*We're targeting 13 to under 20-year-olds because this is the age group that generally carries the bacterium that causes the disease. Even if they have no symptoms, carriers can infect those around them. Vaccinating this age group will lower the number of carriers in Northland and stop the spread of meningococcal disease across the entire community. In other words, vaccinating this age group will help protect all the people in Northland.*

### [How will you contact those who are eligible to notify them about this?](#)

*Northland will have a regional communications campaign via newspaper and radio media to ensure that those who are eligible for vaccination, and their caregivers, are aware of the programme, and where they can get vaccinated.*

### [Why are you missing out the 5 to 12-year-olds?](#)

*Vaccine stocks are limited, both nationally and internationally. Therefore we are vaccinating those most at risk from the disease and also those most likely to carry the disease and infect others.*

### [Why aren't you vaccinating everyone in Northland?](#)

*Vaccine stocks are limited, both nationally and internationally. Therefore we are vaccinating those most at risk from the disease and also those most likely to carry the disease and infect others.*

### [Why are you only getting 20,000 doses?](#)

*Vaccine stock is in short supply globally. New Zealand has purchased the 20,000 doses that are available immediately.*

### [Why are you only targeting Northland and not the rest of New Zealand?](#)

*There is currently a community outbreak in Northland with a higher number of cases for the population than elsewhere in the country. It is important that we act quickly in this region to limit the spread of disease within this community.*

*Although there have been meningococcal W disease cases in other parts of the country, at this stage we do not have other community outbreaks. The Ministry is monitoring the situation closely and will work with other district health boards if there are increases in cases in their regions.*

### What will you do if there are other outbreaks in other communities in New Zealand?

*The Ministry is monitoring the situation closely and will work with other district health boards if there are increases in cases in their regions.*

### When are you starting the vaccination programme? Is that fast enough?

*The vaccine programme will start in early December. The focus of the campaign is to stop the spread throughout the Northland region and is timely in this regard.*

### Why has it taken so long to take action?

*The Ministry and the Northland DHB have been working closely together once the community outbreak was identified in mid-November to determine the best response. Action has been taken immediately once a decision to undertake an outbreak vaccination response was made.*

*Before now, cases have been sporadic and have been dealt with on an individual case-by-case basis with antibiotics to the affected individual and their close contacts.*

### Have there been delays in accessing the vaccine?

*No, as soon as a decision to vaccinate was made, PHARMAC contacted vaccine manufacturers to source the vaccine. Some of the vaccine is coming from Australia, which is why it will only take a week to reach New Zealand, but other stock is coming from further afield and will take several weeks to reach here.*

### Is the time of year this close to Christmas and the end of the school year expected to impact on the roll out?

*The timing this close to Christmas and school holidays makes the logistics challenging but the Ministry and Northland DHB did not want to wait until the New Year to commence the vaccination campaign.*

### Where will you vaccinate those targeted by this campaign?

*The logistics of the campaign have yet to be finalised by Northland DHB, but it is likely to include community outreach. Northland District Health Board plans to start a three-week community vaccination programme on 5 December in selected high schools across Northland.*

### What is your advice to people who aren't covered by the free vaccination campaign?

*Meningococcal disease bacteria can be spread from person-to-person through secretions and respiratory droplets. Therefore, we recommend covering your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough, and wash and dry your hands afterwards. Also, avoid sharing eating or drinking utensils, toothbrushes and pacifiers.*

*People need to be aware of the symptoms of meningococcal disease. The vaccine that will be given in Northland provides protection against four strains of meningococcal disease (A, C, W and Y) but not for the B strain, which is also common in New Zealand. Anyone who has the symptoms of meningococcal disease should talk to their doctor or call Healthline as soon as possible irrespective of whether they have been vaccinated or not.*

*People can also pay privately for the vaccination.*

### What is your advice to people going to the Scout Jamboree in Northland this summer?

*We have advised the organisers of the Jamboree that there is a community outbreak in Northland and advised that extra vigilance is required. We have also suggested that attendees from overseas should check their vaccination status.*

[How many people have contracted meningococcal disease in New Zealand this year and how many have had MenW? How does this compare to last year?](#)

*There have been 102 cases of meningococcal disease in New Zealand so far in 2018 – 29 of these cases have been meningococcal W strain, including 7 in Northland. The MenW strain is the cause of 29 per cent of meningococcal cases.*

*Overall, 10 people have died. Six deaths were due to meningococcal W – three of those people were in Northland.*

*Last year, there were 12 cases of MenW in New Zealand, including only 1 in Northland, and three deaths. In total, there were 94 cases of meningococcal disease in 2017. MenW accounted for 11 per cent of cases.*

[How many have died?](#)

*Overall, ten people have died. Six deaths were due to meningococcal W.*

[Why is meningococcal W disease and on the rise in New Zealand?](#)

*This strain of meningococcal disease is increasing around the world. We don't really know why at this stage.*

[Why is meningococcal W disease so deadly?](#)

*Meningococcal W is a particularly aggressive strain of the bacteria and can quickly lead to severe illness and, in some cases, death. Also, the symptoms can be similar to those of other common illnesses, such as nausea, headaches and gastroenteritis, which means that an early diagnosis of this disease is difficult. That is why the Ministry issued an advisory to GPs and emergency departments to be vigilant for people presenting with symptoms of meningococcal, and encouraged them to treat people with antibiotics before sending them to hospital because early treatment is vital.*

[What if my child has already been vaccinated against other strains of meningococcal disease such as B or C? Can they still get this vaccine?](#)

*Yes*

[What are the symptoms of meningococcal disease?](#)

*The symptoms and signs of meningococcal disease include a fever, nausea, vomiting, headache, stiff neck, rash, sleepiness and irritability. Meningococcal W can also cause gastroenteritis and pneumonia.*

[What should the public do to prevent getting meningococcal disease?](#)

*Meningococcal disease bacteria can be spread from person-to-person through secretions and respiratory droplets.*

*Therefore, we recommend covering your nose or mouth when you sneeze or cough, and wash and dry your hands afterwards. Also, avoid sharing eating or drinking utensils, toothbrushes and pacifiers.*

*Vaccination is the best protection.*

[What should they do if they suspect they have meningococcal disease?](#)

*If you suspect you have meningococcal disease or have any of the symptoms - a fever, nausea, vomiting, headache, stiff neck, rash, sleepiness, irritability, gastroenteritis or pneumonia - it is important to seek medical help immediately by contacting your GP or Healthline.*

[How much will this campaign cost?](#)

*The costs have yet to be calculated.*

### Who will pay for it?

*The campaign costs will be covered by baseline Health funding.*

### What is the long-term strategy?

*Longer term, PHARMAC and the Ministry are considering the best approach to protect people from meningococcal disease.*

### What are you telling GPs and emergency departments regarding treatment and diagnosis?

*Advice has been sent out to GPs and emergency departments about treatment and diagnosis, including asking them to be vigilant in monitoring for potential meningococcal cases.*

### Is there enough vaccine for people wanting to purchase the vaccine privately?

*There is limited supply of the vaccine available privately.*

*We understand that one of the two New Zealand registered manufacturers of Meningococcal W vaccine is currently able to meet private demand for the vaccine.*

*It is important to contact your primary care provider if you want to purchase the vaccine privately. They will be able to advise you if they have the vaccine available.*

## PHARMAC Questions

### Are there plans if there is another outbreak of MenW somewhere in the country?

*If there were another outbreak declared elsewhere this would be considered separately by PHARMAC and the Ministry of Health, including taking clinical advice on the specific needs of the population in the relevant region.*

### Will we be able to source sufficient stock if there is another outbreak?

*There is no further stock of Menactra available in the short term. An alternative vaccine could be sourced if required. (It's all from overseas.)*

### Why can we only get 20,650 doses now?

*This is the available stock that can be secured quickly. The manufacturing lead time for further supply of the Menactra vaccine would be approximately 18 months, so further stock would not be available in a suitable timeframe to address the current outbreak. Available stock is being targeted to the age groups that would have the most impact in preventing the spread of the disease.*

### What is the cost?

*The cost is subject to confidential supply agreements with PHARMAC.*

### General messages

*PHARMAC has been working closely with the Ministry of Health on options to protect the Northland community from meningococcal W.*

*A vaccination campaign targeting under five-year-olds and 13 to under 20-year-olds will be implemented in Northland in response to the meningococcal W outbreak that has been declared in the region.*

*This campaign will be rolled out as soon as stock is available. Ten thousand doses are expected to arrive as early as next week, with the remaining 10,000 arriving in December 2018.*

*We have secured sufficient stock (over 20,000 doses) to vaccinate the priority age groups (under-fives and 13 to under 20-year-olds). These age groups were identified following clinical advice from the Ministry of Health and our own expert clinical advisors, the Immunisation Subcommittee of PTAC.*

*Under five-year-olds are the group most affected once the disease spreads, while 13 to under 20-year-olds are most likely to be carriers of the meningococcal disease (but have no symptoms). Vaccinating these age groups will reduce or stop transmission of meningococcal W to other unvaccinated people.*