

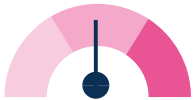
## UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

# Getting Bacterial Meningitis vs. Getting Vaccinated



We all want to make the best health choices for our children. So how risky is bacterial meningitis compared to the vaccines that prevent meningitis (meningococcal)?

## BACTERIAL MENINGITIS FAST FACTS



### HOW CONTAGIOUS?

**Somewhat contagious.** It usually takes close contact (like coughing near someone) or lengthy contact (like living with someone) to spread the bacteria that cause bacterial meningitis. The most common strains of the meningitis bacteria are A, B, C, W, and Y. Meningococcal B and C are responsible for most meningitis cases.<sup>1,2</sup>



### HOW SERIOUS?

**Extremely serious.**  
Serious complications can include:

**Permanent disability:** 1 in 5 meningitis survivors have permanent disabilities, such as brain damage, hearing and vision loss, amputation of limbs, and kidney problems.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

**Death:** 10 to 15 in 100 people. Death can occur in only a few hours.<sup>4,6</sup>



**Babies are at high risk of meningitis because their immune systems are not fully developed and have trouble fighting the infection. Teenagers are also at risk. Outbreaks of meningitis B have happened on college campuses.<sup>2,3,7</sup>**

## VACCINE FAST FACTS



### HOW EFFECTIVE?

The effectiveness of vaccines that protect against meningococcal disease can vary depending on the vaccine and the strain of bacteria and can range from 69%–88% effective.<sup>2</sup>



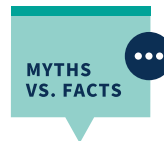
### HOW SAFE?

Generally, for every 1 million vaccines administered in the United States, only about 1–2 doses result in a severe allergic reaction.<sup>8,9</sup>



### SAFETY RECORDS

The first meningitis vaccine (which protects against meningitis strains A, C, W, and Y) was approved in 2005. Since then, cases in teens caused by these serogroups have decreased by 90%. The MenB vaccine (which protects against the B strain) has been used since 2014.<sup>10</sup>



### MYTH BUSTER

Can healthy children and teens get meningitis? Yes. The truth is that the risk of getting meningitis increases in teens and young adults—no matter how healthy they are.<sup>11,12</sup>



**Five separate safety systems continuously monitor all vaccines for as long as the vaccines are given.<sup>13</sup>**

**Learn more at [hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html).**

## COMPARING THE TWO

### BACTERIAL MENINGITIS

### VACCINES TO PREVENT MENINGITIS (MENINGOCOCCAL)

#### Common Mild to Moderate Symptoms and Common Side Effects<sup>1,2,4,6,7,14</sup>

Meningitis is extremely serious and needs immediate medical care. Common symptoms of meningitis can include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Neck stiffness
- Rash
- Fatigue
- Abnormal reflexes
- Sensitive to light
- Feeling confused
- Upset stomach or throwing up

Common side effects of vaccines to prevent meningitis (meningococcal) are usually mild and last 1–3 days. If side effects occur, they can include:

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the vaccine was given
- Muscle or joint pain
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Fever or chills
- Nausea or diarrhea

For infants, additional signs of meningitis include:

- Bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the skull)
- Fussing
- Decreased feeding

## Rare, More Serious Symptoms or Complications and Rare Side Effects<sup>2,3,7,8,9,14</sup>

Serious symptoms or complications of meningitis vary, but 1 in 5 meningitis survivors can have:

- Hearing loss
- Brain damage
- Learning disabilities
- Kidney damage
- Limb amputations

Serious side effects of vaccines to prevent meningitis (meningococcal) vary and can include:

- Severe allergic reaction (generally, for every 1 million vaccines administered in the United States, only about 1–2 doses result in a severe allergic reaction)

### Sources:

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9. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS): <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/side-effects/index.html>
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