

# Serogroups A, C, W, and Y Meningococcal Disease: What Gay and Bisexual Men Need to Know

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but very serious illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Neisseria meningitidis*. The best way to protect yourself during an outbreak is to get vaccinated. Even if treated quickly, meningococcal disease can cause long-term problems or be deadly.



## Meningococcal Disease Can Lead to Meningitis or Bloodstream Infection

Meningococcal disease has two common outcomes – meningitis and bloodstream infection. These infections typically appear within 3 to 7 days after being exposed to the bacteria. Both of these conditions are very serious and can be deadly.

### Meningitis

When someone has meningococcal meningitis, the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord becomes infected and swells. Symptoms of meningococcal meningitis include sudden onset of **fever**, **headache**, and **stiff neck**. There can be additional symptoms, such as:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Confusion

### Bloodstream Infection

When someone has a meningococcal bloodstream infection, the bacteria can enter the bloodstream and multiply, damaging the walls of the blood vessels and causing bleeding into the skin and organs.

Symptoms may include:

- Fever or cold chills
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Cold hands and feet
- Severe aches or pain in the muscles, joints, chest, or belly (abdomen)
- Rapid breathing
- A dark purple rash

**Seek medical attention immediately if you or your child has any symptoms of meningococcal disease.**

## How Can I Protect Myself During an Outbreak?

Meningococcal conjugate vaccine may be recommended for those 2 months old or older who are identified as being at increased risk during an outbreak. **Contact your state or local health department for information related to recommendations for vaccination.**



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
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## Certain People are at Increased Risk for Meningococcal Disease

Babies, teens, and young adults have higher rates of meningococcal disease than people of other ages do. Other factors, such as having certain medical conditions or traveling to certain countries, can increase your risk for getting this disease, no matter how old you are. **Talk to your healthcare professional to see if you are at increased risk for meningococcal disease and need to get vaccinated.**

## Meningococcal Disease is Spread from Person to Person

The bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread by exchanging respiratory and throat secretions (saliva or spit) during close (for example, coughing or kissing) or lengthy contact, especially if living in the same household. Fortunately, these bacteria are much harder to spread than viruses that cause the common cold or the flu.

## Meningococcal Disease is Very Serious but Treatable

Meningococcal disease can be treated with antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria in the body). It is important that treatment be started as soon as possible. However, about 1 to 2 out of every 10 people who get meningococcal disease will die from the infection, even with quick and appropriate treatment. **If you think you or your child has meningococcal disease, seek medical care right away.**

## Outbreaks of Meningococcal Disease are Rare in the U.S.

Typically, only about 2 to 3 out of every 100 cases of meningococcal disease in the United States are related to outbreaks. An outbreak occurs when there are multiple cases of meningococcal disease caused by the same type (serogroup) of *N. meningitidis* in a community over a short period of time. Depending on the size of the community, just two cases could be considered an outbreak.

## Vaccine Side Effects are Usually Mild

Most people who get a meningococcal vaccine do not have any serious problems with it. Side effects are usually mild and go away on their own within a few days, but serious reactions are also possible.

## The Best Way to Prevent Meningococcal Disease is to Get Vaccinated

All preteens and teens should get vaccinated against meningococcal disease.

### Preteens

All 11 to 12 year olds should receive one dose of a meningococcal conjugate vaccine that helps protect against four types (serogroups) of the bacteria: A, C, W, and Y.

### Teens and Young Adults

Teens should receive a booster dose of a meningococcal conjugate vaccine when they are 16 years old to continue having protection during the years (16 through 23 years) when they are most at risk for getting meningococcal disease. Teens and young adults (16 through 23 year olds) may also be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine, preferably when they are between 16 and 18 years old.

