FAQs on the Meningococcal ACWY vaccine
Up-to-date information about the Men ACWY vaccine and some of the most frequently asked questions and answers

The five main groups of meningococcal bacteria that commonly cause disease are groups Men A, Men B, Men C, Men W and Men Y.

Meningococcal group W (Men W) has historically been rare in the UK but since 2009 year on year cases of Men W have increased and continue to do so. A particularly aggressive strain of Men W is causing disease in all age groups but there has been a significant increase in university students.

As the name suggests the Men ACWY vaccine offers protection against the four groups of meningococcal bacteria A, C, W and Y. The Men ACWY vaccine was introduced across the UK in August 2015.

Q. Can anyone get Men W?
A. Men W cases are being diagnosed across all age groups and across the UK. For the first time in over a decade, Men W-associated deaths are being seen in infants and young children.

Q. Why are students and young people particularly affected by this?
A. The recent increase in Men W cases has affected all ages, including infants, toddlers and adolescents. Teenagers are more likely to carry meningococcal bacteria in the back of their throats. Giving a vaccine to 13 – 18 year olds and new university students will directly protect this age group and also reduce the chance of the bacteria spreading to others.

The vaccine is particularly important for those preparing to head off to university as they are at greatest risk of infection; due to higher carriage rates particularly during the first term.

Q. How many cases of Men W have there been?
A. Men W cases have been increasing year-on-year since 2009, with 22 cases confirmed in 2009/10 and 210 cases confirmed in 2015/16. It is expected that this rise in cases will continue if action is not taken to control it.

Q. Why is there an increase in Men W cases?
A. It is not known why there has been a recent rise in Men W cases. Unlike the international Hajj associated Men W outbreak in 2000 – 2002, these recent cases have not been associated with travel or entry to the UK. Most of these recent cases have been caused by a single aggressive Men W strain and have affected all age groups.

Q. Is Men W life-threatening?
A. Like all meningococcal groups, Men W disease is a serious and potentially life-threatening infection.

Q. How many deaths from Men W have there been in recent years?
A. Between 2009 and 2012, Men W caused around 4 deaths every year - mainly among the elderly. During 2013 and 2014 there were 24 deaths among the 193 cases and, for the first time in over a decade, Men W deaths have been seen in infants and toddlers.
Q. What are the symptoms of Men W?

A. Like all meningococcal groups, Men W commonly causes septicaemia and meningitis. The disease develops rapidly and can be fatal within 24 hours.

Q. How important is it to seek medical attention quickly?

A. Early recognition and prompt treatment – especially antibiotics - for patients with meningococcal disease – can be life-saving. Trust your instincts, get medical help immediately.

Q. Is this a new vaccine?

A. The Men ACWY vaccines are called Nimenrix® and Menveo® (manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline). The vaccines have been used for many years across the world and have an excellent safety record. A single dose of either vaccine provides the same level of protection in adolescents and young people.

Q. Who will get the Men ACWY vaccine and when?

A. From September 2015, the Men ACWY vaccine is being offered to teenagers in school when they are around 14 years old. It is given at the same time as the boosters for tetanus, diphtheria and polio.

A catch up programme offers the vaccine to those up to the age of 18. When and where these teenagers are offered the vaccine depends on their age and where they live. School leavers (those aged 17/18) are being offered the vaccine through their GP service, and will be invited to attend their surgery.

First year university students, under the age of 25yrs are also eligible for this vaccine, and should contact their own GP to make an appointment. Please be aware if you live outside Scotland but are attending University in Scotland, ensure you get the Men ACWY vaccine before you go. You will not automatically be able to get it from the GP surgery when you get there.

Q. How many doses are required?

A. One dose is required.

Q. Why are only teenagers being offered the Men ACWY vaccine?

A. Although Men W cases have increased in all age groups, there has been a significant increase in university students. Teenagers and young people are more likely to carry meningococcal bacteria in the back of their throats. By giving the vaccine to 14 – 18 year olds, and new university students, this will directly protect this age group and also reduce the chance of the meningococcal bacteria spreading to others.

Q. Can I ask for my baby/child to be vaccinated with the Men ACWY vaccine?

A. The Men ACWY vaccine is only being offered to 13 – 18 year olds and new university students. However, the vaccine is also recommended for children and adults who are known to be at increased risk of meningococcal disease e.g. those who have no spleen or who have complement deficiency.

Q. What are the common side effects?

A. Vaccine recipients may get soreness, and some redness and swelling in their arm at the site of the injection. They may also get a headache, vomiting or high temperature but these symptoms should resolve after one or two days.