

# Meningococcal School-based Vaccination Program in 2017

The NSW Minister for Health has today announced the start of a school-based meningococcal vaccination program targeting Year 11 and 12 students in Term 2 2017.

Meningococcal W has emerged as a significant cause of invasive meningococcal disease with the number of cases almost tripling in NSW in 2016 compared to 2015. Meningococcal disease is a rare but serious illness that can present as meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord) or septicaemia (blood poisoning) and may be caused by one of several serogroups (or types), including A, B, C, W and Y. Use of meningococcal C vaccine on the National Immunisation Program has almost eradicated meningococcal C disease in Australia.

Evidence from Australia and overseas suggest that meningococcal disease caused by serotype W is significantly more severe than the other serotypes currently circulating in Australia. More information about meningococcal disease is available here:

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Meningococcal\\_disease.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/Meningococcal_disease.aspx).

The vaccination program will target and protect Year 11 and 12 students based on national expert advice that older adolescents have a greater risk of carrying and transmitting meningococcal disease and that school-based vaccination programs are the most effective way of achieving high vaccine uptake in this group. The vaccine is given as a single dose, protects against serotypes A, C, W and Y and has been shown to be both safe and effective.

The Meningococcal W Response Program for students in Years 11 and 12 will run alongside the routine Year 7 vaccination program, with some modification. The second dose of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine normally given to Year 7 students in Term 2 will be deferred, which will allow school immunisation teams to commence the Year 11 and 12 Meningococcal W Vaccination Program from 1 May 2017 at that Term 2 slot instead. There is no harm for Year 7 students in delaying the second dose of the HPV vaccine.

Further consideration will be given to completion of the HPV course for Year 7 students, and correspondence about these arrangements will be made to parents and schools as soon as possible. In determining this schedule, NSW Health has been working with education authorities in the Government, Catholic and Independent sectors so as to minimise disruption to schools and senior students.

Your local Public Health Unit (available on 1300 066 055) will shortly be contacting your school to make arrangements to offer meningococcal vaccination to Year 11 and 12 students, including confirming clinic times and the distribution and collection of consent materials. Your support is greatly appreciated and will help maintain the health and well-being of your students and the broader community.