

Nova Scotia Meningococcal B Vaccine Program

Information for Health Care Professionals

April 8, 2024

Q1. What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is an infection caused by a bacteria (*Neisseria meningitidis*). There are different strains of this bacteria, including A, B, C, W, and Y, that are responsible for the majority of meningococcal disease illness. These illnesses are often severe, can be deadly, and include infections of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and bloodstream.

Q2. What vaccines are available for meningococcal disease?

As part of Nova Scotia's [Routine-Immunization-Schedules-for-Children-Youth-Adults.pdf \(novascotia.ca\)](#), the Meningococcal C vaccine is provided at no cost to children at 12 months of age and Meningococcal A, C, W and Y vaccine is provided at no cost in grade 7. You can also get a Meningococcal B vaccine if you're at increased risk at no cost.

Q3. What is meningococcal B (Men B) disease and why is it important?

Meningococcal B disease is a very rare but serious bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, strain B. Meningococcal disease spreads through direct contact with an infected person's saliva. This can happen through:

- Close physical contact, including kissing.
- Sharing utensils, drinking glasses, toothbrushes, or lipstick.
- Sharing cigarettes or vapes.

Meningococcal disease doesn't spread through the air or being near someone who is infected.

Q.4 What is the vaccine against Men B disease?

The vaccine used in Nova Scotia's publicly funded program is called 4CMenB (Bexsero) and it protects against infection from the type B strain of meningococcal bacteria. Two doses are required, given at least 4 weeks apart. The vaccine is expected to protect against most but not all circulating meningococcal B strains. There is currently no evidence that serogroup B vaccine provides indirect protection, therefore vaccination is expected to result in individual, rather than community-level protection. Additional information, including contraindications and side effects can be found in [Meningococcal vaccine: Canadian Immunization Guide](#) and the [Bexsero product monograph](#).

Q5. Who is now eligible to receive publicly funded 4CMenB vaccine?

Youth less than 26 years of age with a Nova Scotia health card who are:

- entering into post-secondary studies and will be living for the first time in a youth-based congregate living setting* operated by a post-secondary institution (residence/dormitory).
- living for the first time in a youth-based congregate living setting* (i.e., Nova Scotia Youth Centre, youth community residential setting, or long-term youth shelter).
- first time Nova Scotian military recruits less than 26 years of age who will be living within a military congregate living setting* (i.e., military barrack).

* A youth based congregate living setting (CLS) is defined as an institutional residence/dormitory with 13 or more adolescents or young adults (almost or all of whom are not related) and such residents live and use shared spaces such as common sleeping areas, bathrooms, and kitchens.

Q6. Why are these groups eligible?

The eligible populations encounter a very low, but elevated risk of meningococcal disease caused by the B strain compared to the general public due to the following combined factors:

- Close shared living spaces inherent in congregate living settings increase the opportunity for transmission of meningococcal bacteria.
- Late adolescents and early adults, who make up the majority of residents in eligible settings, have higher rates of meningococcal B nasal carriage compared to the general public.

Q7. Are individuals with a Nova Scotia health card who will be living in youth-based congregate living settings outside of Nova Scotia eligible for the 4CMenB vaccine?

Yes, any eligible Nova Scotian youth planning to attend post-secondary school **and** live in a youth-based congregate living setting out of province would still be eligible to receive the vaccine while they remain in Nova Scotia. Advise individuals to plan for enough time to allow for a 4-week interval between the two doses of Meningococcal B vaccine (4CMenB) prior to travelling outside of province to live in a youth-based congregate living setting.

Q8. Are individuals who come to Nova Scotia from other provinces eligible for the 4CMenB vaccine?

No. As per [Policy directive 5.4.1](#), vaccines are not routinely provided through the publicly funded immunization program to visitors or temporary residents of Nova Scotia. Further details are outlined in [section 5.4](#) of the policy.

Q9. Are members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have completed basic training and who are living on base within a congregate living setting eligible?

No. Eligibility is limited to first time military recruits who are attending basic training and will be living in a congregate living setting for a period of 4 weeks or longer. This is because the majority of new recruits attending basic training are expected to fall within the age risk category as compared to other military congregate living settings.

Q10. Is there a timeline for eligibility?

4CMenB vaccine is a two-dose series, with doses given 4 weeks apart. It is recommended to receive the 2 doses of the vaccine prior to living in the congregate living setting, however an individual is eligible to get their first dose within one year of entering the congregate living setting and they can get their second dose until age 25 years. If the series is not completed prior to an individual leaving the province, information should be provided on effectiveness of only receiving one dose, and how to receive a second dose when returning to Nova Scotia.

Q11. Are individuals previously immunized with 4CMenB eligible for re-vaccination?

Individuals who have already been vaccinated with 4CMenB can be managed as follows:

- Have received 2 doses with the second dose given within the last 5 years – not eligible.
- Have received 2 doses with the second dose given greater than 5 years ago – eligible to receive 1 dose.
- Have received only 1 dose – eligible to receive 1 dose.

Q12. If an individual initiated meningococcal B vaccine series with Trumenba (MenB-fHBP), can they complete it with Bexsero (4CMenB)?

No, the two serogroup B meningococcal vaccines currently authorized for use in Canada (MenB-fHBP and 4CMenB) are not interchangeable. If a person with an incomplete vaccination series does not know which vaccine product they initially received, the initial dose(s) should be discounted, and the vaccination series restarted using the same vaccine product for all doses in the new, repeated series. For more information, see the [Canadian Immunization Guide](#). Trumenba vaccine is not a publicly funded vaccine in Nova Scotia.

Q13. Are there any additional benefits to receiving this 4CMenB vaccine (Bexsero)?

Preliminary research findings report that 4CMenB vaccine (Bexsero) may offer some level of protection against *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. More studies are needed to understand the type and extent of protection from gonorrhea that Bexsero may offer, and the vaccine is not licensed for this indication.

Q14. How can eligible individuals obtain the vaccine?

Family physicians, primary care, University Health Services and community pharmacies can offer the 4CMenB vaccine (Bexsero) to people meeting the eligibility criteria for youth outlined in the [Publicly Funded Vaccine Eligibility for Individuals at High Risk of Acquiring Vaccine Preventable Diseases](#). Vaccine must be ordered into the primary care office, so it is important to plan accordingly with your patient. Appointments can be booked with a family physician, primary care clinic, University Health Services or pharmacy appointments can be booked online via the [CANImmunize platform](#).

Military recruits may not have a Nova Scotia health card as they typically receive health care exclusively from their employer once they are with the military. However, they are still eligible to receive the 4CMenB vaccine in Nova Scotia. Appointments for such individuals can be made by calling pharmacies directly or visiting the pharmacy.

For youth living in other congregate living settings, the program will be provided in a mixed model (ie. within the institution and through pharmacies).

If an individual is having challenges accessing the vaccine, direct them to call their local [Public Health Office](#).

Q15. What proof is needed to determine eligibility?

Documents such as post-secondary residence offer letters, boarding school residence letters, or military orders to present for basic training should be provided to support determination of eligibility. However, if documentation is not available, immunizers can conduct a verbal assessment with the client to determine eligibility based on self-report.

Q16. Should an individual be refused if they do not provide proof of eligibility?

If documentation is not available, immunizers can conduct a verbal assessment with the client to determine eligibility based on self-report. As [per Policy directive 5.2](#), the decision to immunize will depend on a thorough case by case analysis of risks and benefits. This removes barriers for those individuals that may not have all their paperwork.

Q17. How long must an individual live in a youth based CLS to be considered eligible?

Although duration of residence in an eligible youth based CLS may not be known, in general, immunization can be offered if length of residence is expected to be equal to or greater than 4 weeks.

Q18. Why do the two doses need to be administered to youth less than the age of 26??

Bexsero is not indicated for use by the manufacturer after 25 years of age.

Q19. How should 4CMenB vaccine be stored and handled?

Store Bexsero vaccine in a refrigerator at +2°C to +8°C. Do not freeze and do not use vaccine that may have been frozen. Protect from light and do not use after the expiry date. If the vaccine has been exposed to temperatures outside this range, isolate the vaccine and please notify your local Public Health office for further instructions prior to administration.

Q20. Can the 4CMenB vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Yes, and it's recommended to use a separate injection site if more than one vaccine is given at the same time. Bexsero should never be mixed with another vaccine in the same syringe.

Q21. When should I report an adverse event?

Nova Scotia Meningococcal B Vaccine Program Information for Health Care Professionals

Adverse events following immunization (AEFI) are classified as any serious or unexpected adverse event temporally related to vaccination. An unexpected AEFI is an event that is not listed in available product information but may be due to the immunization, or a change in the frequency of a known AEFI.

Vaccine providers are required by law to report the AEFI following immunization to Public Health. See the following for more information: [It's the Law: Report Adverse Events](#).

For more information regarding the Men B program, please visit: [Meningococcal vaccines - Government of Nova Scotia, Canada](#)