

THE WILSON PRACTICE

Information for patients

Questions about the Meningitis B vaccination

The two most common questions we are asked in the practice are:

- **Why is the NHS only providing the Meningitis B (MenB) vaccination for babies?**
- **Can I pay privately to have my older children vaccinated against Meningitis B?**

The short answers are:

- Babies are at the greatest risk from this devastating disease
- GP surgeries are not permitted to offer the vaccination privately to patients who are not eligible. There are private clinics offering vaccination for children outside of the eligible age group, but there is currently a shortage of vaccine and whilst supplies for the NHS programme are assured, the vaccine manufacturer has advised private clinics to avoid starting new courses of vaccine.

The detail behind these answers comes from NHS England, the organisation Meningitis Now (www.meningitisnow.org) that is campaigning for a more comprehensive vaccination programme, and from Glaxo Smith Kline, the manufacturer of the Meningitis B vaccine.

General background

Since September 2015, the NHS programme in England has offered babies aged from two to nine months the MenB vaccine as part of their routine vaccination programme.

Whilst not diminishing the serious nature of meningitis, it should be noted that there are a number of different strains and for some there is already a comprehensive vaccination programme.

When the nationwide MenB vaccination programme was introduced last year, England became the first country to protect babies from this devastating disease.

Why only babies?

When any new immunisation programme is introduced, there has to be a date to determine eligibility. This decision based is on the best independent clinical recommendation to ensure those most at risk are protected.

The Department of Health is advised on immunisation matters, including the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of new vaccines by the independent expert body, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation>.

The JCVI advised that the Meningococcal B vaccination programme should aim to protect infants before they reach five months of age because this is when the risk is greatest. The vaccine is first offered to children from 2 months of age.

The Department of Health says: "When any new immunisation programme is introduced, there has to be a cut-off date to determine eligibility. We recognise that families with children outside the eligible age groups will be naturally disappointed, but there is no other way of realistically starting new programmes. At the same time, the number of children vaccinated will continue to increase as the programme grows and by next year, one year olds and many two year olds will also be protected by the vaccine."

Can parents or guardians whose children don't fall into the eligible age groups get their child vaccinated against MenB? If so, how?

The Department of Health comments: "We realise that parents are very likely to approach practices requesting private administration of the MenB vaccine. It should be noted that GPs cannot administer vaccines on a private basis to patients on their own practice lists.

"Children can be vaccinated through a private clinic that is able to obtain the vaccine from the manufacturer. However, parents or guardians should be aware that they will be responsible for the full cost of the vaccine.

"It is not appropriate for NHS England to advise of or signpost to any private suppliers of these vaccines as these suppliers act outside of the NHS and we cannot therefore assure that they are following the required standards for the safe storage, supply and administration of these medicines.

"There is also currently a shortage of supply of the MenB vaccine, and although this does not affect supply to the national vaccination programme, it may affect access to private supplies.

Sue Davie, CEO, Meningitis Now, commented: "We are aware of the supply constraints of Bexsero [the MenB vaccine] in some private clinics, but are satisfied that this will not affect the NHS immunisation schedule. We are however concerned that those wishing to pay for the vaccine may not have access to it at this time and hope that this issue can be resolved quickly."

Details of the current vaccination programme

MenB immunisation was introduced from 1 September for those babies who are due to receive their primary immunisations starting at 2 months of age on or after 1 September 2015 (ie those born on or after 1 July 2015), with a one-off catch-up programme for those infants born from 1 May 2015 to 30 June 2015.

Children who are now aged up to 9 months should have been offered the vaccine.

February 2016