

Nova Scotia Meningococcal B Vaccine Program – Frequently Asked Questions

What is meningococcal B (Men B)?

Meningococcal disease is a very rare but serious bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Neisseria meningitidis*, strain B. These bacteria can sometimes be carried in the nose without causing symptoms or illness (known as carriage). Occasionally, a healthy person will become ill when bacteria becomes invasive and enters the bloodstream and can cause serious illness, like inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord.

Am I eligible to receive the Men B vaccine?

You are eligible to receive the Men B vaccine if you are 25 years and younger with a Nova Scotia Health Card who is entering 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).

In addition, first time Nova Scotian military recruits 25 years of age and younger who will be living within a military youth-based congregate living setting* (i.e., military barrack) are also eligible.

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

Why is this vaccine being offered to me?

Research shows that carriage of *Neisseria meningitidis*, strain B is higher among youth than the general population. Although living in a congregate living setting, where all others are also youth, places individuals at higher risk for acquiring the disease, the risk of the bacteria invading the body and causing serious illness is very low.

If I am a Nova Scotian accepted to a post-secondary school outside of Nova Scotia, am I eligible for the Men B vaccine?

Yes, any eligible Nova Scotians planning to attend post-secondary school **and** live in an associated congregate living setting out-of-province would be eligible while still in Nova Scotia. Plan for vaccination prior to travelling outside of the province to live in a congregate living setting so that there is enough time to receive both doses (one month apart).

What vaccine will I receive?

Bexsero is a meningococcal B vaccine used in Nova Scotia's high-risk publicly funded program. Two doses are required, given at least four weeks apart.

What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

The common side effects of this vaccine are headache, pain, swelling and redness where the needle goes in, as well as fever.

When should I get vaccinated?

To be fully vaccinated from meningitis B, you will need two doses, four weeks apart. You are eligible to get your first dose within one year of entering an eligible congregate living setting. You can get your second dose until age 25 years. However, we do recommend that you are fully vaccinated prior to living in the congregate setting.

If it takes two doses, does that mean I won't have full immunity after one dose?

The first dose provides good immunity. The second dose strengthens immunity and ensures it is long lasting.

Why do the two doses need to be administered by the age of 25 years?

Bexsero is not recommended for individuals after 25 years of age.

How can I receive this vaccine?

Community pharmacies and healthcare providers administer the vaccine.

*Military recruits may not have a Nova Scotia Health Card as you typically receive health care exclusively from your employer once you are with the military. However, you are still eligible to receive the vaccine in Nova Scotia.

What if there isn't a pharmacy close to me that is offering the Meningococcal B vaccine?

Please call your local Public Health office, and they will arrange for you to get the vaccine (<https://www.nshealth.ca/public-health-offices>).

What proof of eligibility do I need to provide?

Documents such as post-secondary residence offer letters or military orders to present for basic training should be presented to the healthcare provider to show your eligibility.

I'm not sure how long my military training will be, should I still get the vaccine?

Yes, the vaccine is still recommended.

Can youth from other provinces/countries receive the Meningococcal B vaccine if they will be living in a congregate living setting in Nova Scotia?

No, this publicly funded (free) program is for youth who are Nova Scotia residents. If an individual has a Nova Scotia Health Card, they can receive publicly funded immunizations in Nova Scotia. Otherwise, they are not eligible for this program. However, the Meningococcal B vaccine can be prescribed by a healthcare provider and purchased at a pharmacy.

Do I have to pay for this?

There will be no cost to youth who meet the eligibility criteria.

Why are university/college students more prone to getting meningococcal disease than others?

Many, for the first time, are living in close conditions in residences with new people, and this, combined with certain behaviors (such as sharing cigarettes/vaping devices, sharing drinks, sharing food, and other activities involving the exchange of saliva) that aren't as common in other populations may put university students at increased risk. However, all young adults are susceptible to meningococcal disease due to their propensity for sharing things like cigarettes/vaping devices, drinks, and lipstick.

Where can I learn more about meningococcal meningitis?

You can visit <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/CDPC/meningitis.asp>

For more information regarding the Meningitis B vaccine program, please visit:

<https://novascotia.ca/meningococcal-vaccines/>