

## **IMPORTANT: Information on Meningitis B following recent media coverage**

Practice staff will be aware that there is currently media coverage regarding the sad death of a second teenager from Bristol from meningitis B. His family members are currently calling for teenagers to be given Men B vaccine and to seek this privately as it is not available as part of the routine NHS immunisation schedule. This follows the previous petition to parliament and parliamentary debate last year which called for all children under 11 to be given this vaccine.

### **PHE Screening and Immunisation Team have stated:**

"Our thoughts are with George's family at this difficult time.

"When any new immunisation programme is introduced, there has to be a starting point for offering the vaccine and this is a decision based on the best independent clinical recommendation to ensure we can protect those children most at highest risk of Men B disease. Evidence shows that the highest incidence of disease occurs in children under 5 and most specifically in those aged under 1 year of age.

"When our nationwide MenB vaccination programme was introduced last year, England became the first country to protect our babies from this devastating disease. All children who are now aged up to 2 years should have already been offered the vaccine."

"This is a devastating, but thankfully rare disease, in which symptoms can develop rapidly. Whilst immunisation can offer protection against some strains there are others which are not vaccine preventable and it is therefore important that parents and professional remain vigilant and raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia so that prompt action can be taken where children or young people become ill"

"Symptoms of infection may include:

- Fever, cold hands and feet
- Severe headache, joint or muscle pains
- Stiff neck
- Dislike of bright lights
- Vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- Pale, blotchy skin with or without a rash
- Irritability and/or confusion
- Drowsiness, difficult to wake up
- Convulsions/seizures

Note: Not everyone will develop these symptoms and they can appear in any order. Teenagers may also present with atypical primary symptoms such as gastroenteritis or painful joints (septic arthritis)"

## **Background**

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.

MenB immunisation was introduced from 1 September for those babies who were due to receive their primary immunisations starting at 2 months of age on or after 1 September 2015 (i.e. 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 2 years of age should have been offered the vaccine.

We recognise that when tragedies such as this occur, families with children outside of the current eligible age groups, including parents of teenagers, will be naturally concerned that this is not part of the national programme and will seek to address this, but the reason it is not included is because there is currently insufficient evidence to support the introduction of a programme for this age group. Research is continuing into carriage of neisseria meningitidis in teenagers and JCVI continue to review any new evidence and to keep the current recommendations under review.

(Please note: Men B vaccine is also recommended for administration to patients in certain at risk groups in addition to the primary childhood programme detailed above – see full details in the Green Book).

### **Private administration of MenB vaccine**

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. They may however consider reciprocal arrangements with another practice for this purpose.

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.

Contact by parents does, however, present an opportunity for practices to check the child or young person's immunisation status and to offer any immunisations that the child may have previously missed to ensure they are as fully protected as possible against other strains of meningitis and other diseases with potentially serious consequences (HiB/MenC/MMR etc). We would encourage practices to do this wherever possible – particularly in light of the fact that we have had other cases which have involved a different strain and / or strains that are not vaccine preventable.

If Practices have any queries regarding this or any other vaccination programmes please contact the Screening and Immunisation Team via [england.southwestscrimms@nhs.net](mailto:england.southwestscrimms@nhs.net)

Please do not contact the local Child Health Teams as they are not able to assist with clinical matters or those relating to eligibility.