



For more information about the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists or to find a service in your area, call (866) 626-6847 or visit us online at: www.OTISpregnancy.org.

Meningococcal Disease (Bacterial meningitis) Vaccine and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to the meningococcal vaccine can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the lining that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Meningitis can have multiple causes, including viruses and bacteria. One type of bacteria that causes meningitis is the meningococcus bacteria. Meningococcal disease is a very serious condition. Even with appropriate antibiotic treatment, meningococcal disease can cause death or result in life-long disability. Fortunately, meningococcal disease is not common and preventative vaccines are available.

Is bacterial meningitis contagious?

Yes. While bacterial meningitis is not as contagious as a cold or the flu, it can still be passed on through contact with a sick person's throat or mouth secretions. For example, it can be passed from person to person through coughing or kissing. Individuals living close together, like students in a college dorm, are at increased risk for getting bacterial meningitis.

What is the meningococcal vaccine?

The meningococcal vaccine provides protection against the common types of bacterial meningitis. These vaccines are known as MCV4 meningococcal conjugate vaccine (brand names: Menveo[®] and Menactra[®]) and MPSV4 meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine (brand name: Menomune[®]). The MCV4

vaccines are newer than the MPSV4 vaccine and provide longer lasting protection. Both vaccines are noninfectious and cannot give a person bacterial meningitis. Each vaccine is given as a one-time injection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the MCV4 vaccine for individuals age 11-18.

I just got the meningococcal vaccine. How long should I wait until I get pregnant?

Since the meningococcal vaccine is noninfectious, there is no specific recommended waiting period before attempting to get pregnant.

I didn't know I was pregnant when I got the meningococcal vaccine, is there a risk to my baby?

Noninfectious vaccines are considered to be a low risk during pregnancy. Four small studies found no harmful effects on pregnancy from the MPSV4 vaccine. These studies included the infants of over 200 women who received the MPSV4 vaccine during pregnancy. Most of these women were vaccinated after the first trimester. Larger studies are being done now to get more information about the meningococcal vaccine during pregnancy.

There is an outbreak of meningococcal disease in my area - should I get the vaccine even though I am pregnant?

Meningococcal disease is a very serious condition. If you are at risk to get the disease, it is recommended that you get the vaccine, regardless of whether or not you are pregnant. The MPSV4 vaccine is preferred over the MCV4 vaccine during pregnancy, since there is currently no published information about the safety of the MCV4 vaccine during pregnancy.

Can I receive the meningococcal vaccine while breastfeeding?

Yes. Noninfectious vaccines like the meningococcal vaccine are compatible with breastfeeding.

The father of the baby received meningococcal vaccine around the time that I got pregnant. Is there a risk to the baby?

No. There is no evidence that vaccines given to men will affect the sperm, and vaccines given to men should not be able to reach a developing baby.

OTIS is currently conducting the [Meningitis Vaccine in Pregnancy Study](#). The purpose of the study is to learn more about meningitis vaccines in pregnancy. If you are pregnant and have received the meningitis vaccine during your pregnancy or within 18 months prior to your first day of last menstrual period, and you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact the OTIS Studies Coordinating Center at 877-311-8972.

Selected References:

Adam I and Abdalla MA. 2005. Is meningococcal polysaccharide vaccine safe during pregnancy? *Ann Trop Med Parasitol* 99(6):627-628.

Letson GW, et al. 1998. Meningococcal vaccine in pregnancy: an assessment of infant risk. *Pediatr Infect Dis J* 17:261-263.

O'Dempsey TJD, et al. 1996. Immunization with a pneumococcal capsular polysaccharide vaccine during pregnancy. *Vaccine* 14(10):963-970.

Shahid NS, et al. 2002. Placental and breast transfer of antibodies after maternal immunization with polysaccharide meningococcal vaccine: a randomized, controlled evaluation. *Vaccine* 20:2404-2409.

*If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call **OTIS** at **1-866-626-6847**.*