



## Important notice for parents of students who are starting Grades 9 to 12 September 2014.

**As of July 1, 2014, the meningococcal vaccine (Menactra®) will be required for school attendance.**

Menactra® will be mandatory like the diphtheria, tetanus and polio vaccines.

You are receiving this letter because your son or daughter has not been vaccinated.

Due to changes to the *Immunization of School Pupils Act*, your son or daughter is in need of the Menactra® vaccine. The Halton Region Health Department is offering special Menactra® “catch-up” clinics over the summer. This vaccine is not routinely available at your family doctor’s office.

Previously, vaccination against meningitis was voluntary.

Clinics are by appointment only and can be booked online at [halton.ca/menactracatchup](http://halton.ca/menactracatchup).

### **What to do next:**

1. Visit [halton.ca/menactracatchup](http://halton.ca/menactracatchup) or dial 311
2. Book an appointment
3. Get your son/daughter vaccinated
4. Keep your immunization record

**Please read the information on the back of this notice with your child.**



Halton.ca ☎ 311



# What families should know about meningococcal infections & the Menactra® vaccine

Vaccines are the best way to protect people against very serious infections like meningococcal disease. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends the Menactra® vaccine as it protects against several strains of meningococcal infections not protected by previous meningitis vaccines.

Please note: The *Immunization of School Pupils Act* has changed to include Menactra® as a mandatory immunization for attendance in school.

## What are meningococcal infections?

- Meningococcal infections are caused by the bacteria, *Neisseria meningitidis*. Meningococcal bacteria are contagious.
- The bacteria are quite common and live in the back of the nose and throat in about one in five teens and adults without making them sick. In rare instances, the bacteria can overcome the body's natural defenses and cause serious disease.
- Five types of the *Neisseria* bacteria (A, B, C, Y, and W-135) cause almost all infections.
- There are two serious forms of the disease:
  - an infection of the lining of the brain called "meningococcal meningitis"
  - a blood infection called "meningococemia"

## How do meningococcal infections spread?

The bacteria spreads from person to person through saliva, usually through coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing things like food, drink, water bottles, musical instrument mouthpieces, toothbrushes, cigarettes, lipstick, or lip-gloss.

The bacteria can also be contracted by travelling to parts of the world, like countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where meningococcal infections are more widespread.

## What are the symptoms of the disease?

The earliest signs are fever, drowsiness, reduced consciousness, and irritability. Other signs include severe headache, vomiting, stiff neck, and pain when moving the head and neck. In many cases, red spots on the skin appear which do not disappear when pressed.

Symptoms of meningococcal infections can become serious and possibly life-threatening very quickly, sometimes within hours.

## What are the risks of the disease?

- Meningococcal disease progresses rapidly, and is fatal in 8 to 15% of cases.
- Between 10 to 20% of people that survive these infections will have permanent damage such as hearing loss, kidney problems, scarring or loss of limbs.

## Why should my child be vaccinated?

**Menactra® is mandatory for attendance in school.**

Menactra® is very effective when given just before or early in the teenage years. Teenagers and young adults are among those at high risk for serious meningococcal infections because a higher number of them carry the bacteria in their noses or throats.

If your child plans to attend college or university, you should know that many of these institutions require students to have this vaccine before they can stay in residence or dormitories.

## Who should not get this vaccine?

Menactra® should **not** be given to anyone who has:

- a known allergy to any component of the Menactra® vaccine
- had a reaction to any type of meningococcal vaccine, or to diphtheria vaccine
- a high fever or a serious infection worse than a cold on the day of the school clinic
- a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome

## Is Menactra® safe?

Yes. The most common side effects are soreness and redness at the site where the needle was given. Occasionally, some people will develop a mild fever or headache. These side effects usually last for one or two days.

More severe side effects such as high fever, trouble breathing, and hives have occurred but are very unlikely. Research shows they occur in less than 0.01% of those who receive the vaccine.

For more information on meningococcal infections and the Menactra® vaccine, visit  
**Halton.ca/menactracatchup**

You can also contact the Halton Region Health Department by dialing 311.

