BEXSERO Meningitis B Vaccine Factsheet

In the UK from September 2015 babies born on or after 1 July 2015 are being offered the MenB (meningococcal group B) vaccine as part of the routine immunisation schedule and babies born on or after 1 May are being offered the vaccine as part of a one off catch-up campaign.

Babies under the age of 1 are at the highest risk of disease and are over 4 times more likely to contract this illness than any other age group. This is why all babies are offered the vaccine routinely on the NHS at 2, 4 and 12 months of age.

MenB is a devastating disease which can be fatal in 10% of cases and so we understand why parents wish to get their children vaccinated as soon as possible. However we would like to remind people that this is a rare disease, affecting around 5 in 100,000 children annually in the 1-4 age group and the risk amongst those over the age of 5 is much less again.

Children who were born before 1st May 2015 are not eligible to be vaccinated on the NHS, but have the option of paying to be vaccinated privately. Unfortunately, due to high demand for the vaccine, there is currently a shortage in the private vaccine supply for new patients.

GSK, the manufacturers of the vaccine have released the following statement: "*Due to unexpected global demand for Bexsero during 2015, we are experiencing supply constraints during the first half of this year. Although vaccination through the NHS childhood programme has been prioritised and is unaffected, we have unfortunately had to ask private clinics temporarily to not start new courses of vaccination. Children who have already started their course of the vaccine privately should still be able receive their follow up doses. We know the unexpectedly high demand for the vaccine reflects the importance parents have placed on protecting their children from meningitis B, so we are working hard to increase supply, and expect to have increased stock by the summer of 2016*."

MenB vaccine should be free of charge to people with medical conditions that put them at high risk of getting meningococcal disease: people with asplenia, splenic dysfunction or complement disorder, including those on Eculizumab therapy (the same groups who are entitled to get MenACWY vaccine under current guidelines.

Will this vaccine be offered to adolescents free of charge within the health service?

There is no current UK recommendation for adolescents to be vaccinated.

Typically, meningococcal disease is most common in babies and children under five, with a second peak in adolescence. However, at present the peak age for meningococcal disease is at 5 months of age, and the number of cases in adolescents is even lower than usual.

In theory, vaccinating teenagers could have benefits for the whole population, in addition to directly protecting those vaccinated. Teenagers are the main carriers of meningococcal bacteria, so if vaccinating them could prevent them from carrying the bug and passing it on, it could protect everyone, including people who aren't vaccinated.

However, in the UK the JCVI concluded that there was not enough evidence about the extent to which the MenB vaccine would stop teenagers from carrying and transmitting the bug, nor how long vaccination would directly protect this age group. For these reasons the JCVI recommended that a carriage study should be undertaken in adolescents to show whether the vaccine could stop them acquiring the bacteria in their throats. The results from this study will help them decide whether the vaccine should be offered to all teenagers in future.

My child is too old to qualify for the MenB vaccine on the NHS. Should I get them vaccinated privately?

If your child was born before 1 May 2015 they are not eligible to receive any vaccine doses on the NHS.

Babies are at the highest risk of contracting meningococcal disease with peak incidence occurring at around 5 months of age. This is why the vaccine is offered early at 2 and 4 months followed by a booster at 12 months.

Children older than 5 months of age are still at risk of disease, but their risk is substantially lower than that of younger babies which is why routine vaccination on the NHS is focussing on the youngest age groups.

Over the past ten years, the incidence of MenB disease has been steadily declining and at the moment cases of disease are lower than they have been for decades. Current incidence of disease amongst the under 1s is around 22 per 100,000, reducing to 5 per 100,000 in the 1-4 age groups. The incidence of disease amongst older age groups is substantially less.

MenB is a deadly and disabling disease with such a rapid onset that some parents may wish to have their child protected however small the risk of them contracting disease. The vaccine is available privately for parents who wish purchase it.

How can I get the vaccine for my child if s/he is not eligible for it free of charge within the health service?

GPs and travel clinics throughout the UK have been informed that the vaccine is available. GPs are not able to offer the vaccine to their own registered patients, but they may be able to arrange it via another surgery on private prescription. You can also get the vaccine from a travel vaccination clinic in your area, or a private GP practice. It is worth asking more than one clinic as prices can vary considerably.

The manufacturer has a customer service line in the UK for healthcare professionals only. GPs or other health professionals can ring to get the vaccine: 08457 451500, Mon-Thu 8am-4.45pm and Fri 8am-1pm, http://www.bexsero.co.uk/healthcare-professional/ordering-bexsero.htm. The manufacturer is prohibited by law from speaking to members of the public on this line and any patients who call will be referred back to their healthcare practitioner.

How much will the vaccine cost if I want to get it privately?

As a guideline, the NHS list price of the vaccine is £75 per dose excluding VAT. GPs or Clinics administering the vaccine privately or clinics their own charges for administration – prices in excess of £125/dose are not unusual. More than one dose of the vaccine is needed for sufficient protection – the total number depends on the age of the person being vaccinated.