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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

### **Meningitis protection in B.C. gets a boost**

VICTORIA – Young British Columbians will be further protected against more types of meningitis with the introduction of a vaccine for Grade 9 students that protects against four strains of the bacteria instead of only one.

“We’ve seen the rates of meningococcal C steadily decline in B.C.,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “Expanding our program to include this vaccine means children will now have protection against three additional types of meningococcal disease. With both National Immunization Week and World Meningitis Day upon us, this is a good time for parents to make sure their children are up-to-date on the meningitis vaccine and all their shots.”

The meningococcal C (Men-C) vaccine has been part of B.C.’s routine immunization program since 2003 and protects against meningococcal bacteria, type C and will continue to be given to infants. Previously, a booster dose of the Men-C vaccine was provided to all children in Grade 6. In September 2016, that booster will be replaced with a quadrivalent vaccine which protects against A, Y, and W, alongside C and administered in Grade 9.

“Meningococcal disease is a severe bacterial infection and can be life-threatening,” said Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “Providing the quadrivalent booster in Grade 9 gives adolescents the best protection as they enter the peak years outside of infancy for contracting meningococcal disease, which are between 15 and 24 years of age.”

Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria that spreads from one person to another by coughing, sneezing, or close face-to-face contact. It is a serious and life-threatening disease, and can cause meningitis, an infection of the lining of the brain, and septicemia, an infection of the blood.

Permanent complications of infection include brain damage and deafness. For every 100 children who get sick, up to 15 will die. Symptoms include headache, fever and stiff neck. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to bright light, confusion, and a purplish skin rash. Anyone with these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention.

People who are not eligible for the free vaccine but want to be protected against meningococcal A, C, Y and W-135 strains of the disease can purchase the quadrivalent vaccine at most travel clinics and pharmacies.

A vaccine for protection against the type B meningococcal strain is approved by Health Canada. The vaccine is provided free in B.C. to those two months to 55 years of age who have been in close contact with a case of meningococcal B disease. People who are not eligible and want to be protected against meningococcal B disease may purchase the vaccine at most travel clinics and pharmacies as well.

**Learn More:**

To learn more about B.C.'s immunization program, visit: <http://immunizebc.ca>

To learn more about meningitis: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthtopics/content.asp?hwid=aa34518>

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