



**SUMMER  
2018-2019**

# **SPRINGS MEDICAL COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER**





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## **Welcome to your Springs Medical Community Newsletter**


Our aim is to provide you with quality health and wellbeing information and to keep you up to date with what's happening at Springs Medical's Daylesford and Trentham clinics.

Our team is here to answer any questions you may have about our newsletter.

We'd love to hear your ideas for future topics. Please contact us at

**[newsletter@springsmedical.com.au](mailto:newsletter@springsmedical.com.au)**.

We look forward to hearing from you.



# Meningococcal disease: are you at risk?

You may have heard about the rise of meningococcal disease in Australia, but do you know your risk of catching it and if you are eligible for a free vaccine?

Meningococcal disease is a relatively rare but very frightening and devastating illness that starts with flu-like symptoms. Recent outbreaks have prompted important changes to vaccines and immunisation programs across Australia.

Outbreaks make media headlines because healthy people can be at death's door very quickly.

In 2017, 382 cases were reported nationally with 28 deaths. So far ten people have died from it in Australia in 2018.

Meningococcal infection can lead to loss of limbs, brain damage, severe scarring and death. Infants, young children, adolescents, gay and bisexual men, and men who have sex with men (MSM) are among those most at risk in our community.

More than a million teenagers aged 14 to 19 will receive the Nimenrix vaccine (that protects against four strains of the disease – A,C,W and Y) from April 2019 under a new free national program. Infants aged 12 months already receive free vaccination under the NIP. Free vaccination is also available until the end of this year for all MSM living in Victoria.

This means that the highest risk groups in Victoria will be protected against the A, C, W and Y strains of the disease.

Springs Medical GP Dr Gerard Ingham says people shouldn't be alarmed, but should consider being immunised against the illness, especially people in high-risk groups.

He says the condition can be confusing for patients because the five main strains of the disease are a mini alphabet– A, B, C, W and Y. While there are vaccines to protect against these strains of meningococcal disease, different vaccines protect against different strains. That's why it's important to get good advice.

'If you are confused about how best to protect yourself and your family from this illness, you need to have a discussion with your doctor,' Gerard says.

Free vaccines for eligible people are available from Springs Medical's Daylesford and Trentham Clinics. If you have been in contact with someone who has meningococcal infection, speak with your doctor about assessment and treatment options.

*Dr Gerard Ingham: General Practitioner and a Director of Springs Medical.*



**'If you are confused about how to best protect yourself... you need to have a discussion with your doctor.'**

# Fast Facts

## What is meningococcal disease?

The disease occurs when meningococcal bacteria enter the blood stream and cause infection of the blood and/or inflammation of the membrane that surrounds the brain (meningitis).

## How does it spread?

About 10 per cent of us carry the meningococcal bacteria in our throat without becoming sick. Bacteria are spread by mucus through close personal contact or prolonged contact in households or dormitories. Young children are more likely to put themselves at risk of meningococcal infection by putting shared toys in their mouth and sharing food and drink. Social interactions such as deep kissing and sharing drinks put teenagers and young adults at greater risk. Meningococcal bacteria don't survive long outside our bodies, so it's very unlikely adults will contract the disease by touching objects such as phones or shopping trolleys.

## How will I know if I have it?

The disease usually first presents with flu-like symptoms:

- sudden fever
- headache
- neck stiffness.
- sore joints
- nausea
- vomiting
- sensitivity to light

By the time a rash of red-purple spots or bruises appears, the illness has reached a very serious stage. Parents should be aware that young children with the illness may only have vomiting, fever and lethargy, so it's important they seek immediate medical advice if they are concerned. Diagnosis is confirmed by blood tests and examination of spinal fluid.

## How can I protect myself?

Immunisation is the best protection against meningococcal disease. Even if you've had the disease previously, you may not have lifelong immunity and are still advised to be immunised. Speak to your doctor if you are unsure. Good hygiene practices such as not sharing drinks, mouthguards or toothbrushes can also reduce your risk of infection.

# Do I need to be immunised?

The Australian Government recommends immunisation for:

- babies and young children
- adolescents and young adults, especially those living in close proximity, such as dormitories
- travellers to places where meningococcal disease is more common
- people with weakened immune systems
- people with certain blood disorders
- laboratory staff working with meningococcal bacteria

The Victorian Government also recommends immunisation for:

- gay and bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM)
- people who inject drugs
- anyone wanting protection from meningococcal disease

Your doctor can advise how you can be best immunised.

## Am I eligible a free vaccine?

Vaccines are provided free to some high-risk groups under the National Immunisation Program (NIP). The Victorian Government also funds vaccines for some groups not included under the NIP.

Free four-in-one ACWY vaccines are currently available in Victoria for:

- children aged 12 months
- unimmunised people under 20 years who did not have their meningococcal C vaccine at 12 months of age can receive a catch up dose

- gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (Free until 31 December 2018)
- Students in Year 10 or aged 15 to 16 years. (Free until 31 December 2018)

Free vaccinations for teenagers aged 14 to 19 will be available from April 2019. Students aged 14 to 16 years will receive the ACWY vaccine through the NIP under a school-based program. Adolescents aged 15 to 19 years who haven't received the vaccine in school will be able to receive it free through an ongoing GP-based catch up program.

While meningococcal B vaccination is recommended for infants, children, adolescents and young adults, it's not free in Victoria. B vaccines can be bought on private prescription.

## I'm not eligible for a free vaccine. How much will immunisation cost?

Meningococcal vaccine price estimates\*:

Bexsero (B strain)	\$143.00
Menactra (ACWY strains)	\$80.00
Menveo (ACWY strains)	\$98.00

There is a doctor consultation fee but some consultations for meningococcal immunisation may be eligible for bulk billing.

Please call your clinic for more information.  
\*Price estimates may vary depending on the availability of the different brands.



# Important information for all men who have sex with men



While anyone can get meningococcal disease, the gay and bisexual community is particularly susceptible to the recent outbreak of the C strain of the disease. It's important all gay men, bisexual men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are protected through immunisation. If you are unsure if you already have sufficient immunity, speak to your doctor.

Free four-in-one vaccinations are currently available for all MSM living in Victoria. This Victorian Government-funded program ends on 31 December this year. One dose of Menactra vaccine will protect against the A, C, W and Y strains of meningococcal disease. Two doses are required for people living with HIV.

Vaccination to protect against hepatitis A is also free for MSM until the end of the year. Vaccination for human papilloma virus (HPV) is free for all MSM up to 26 years of age until the end of the year. Hepatitis B vaccination remains free for all MSM as part of a long-term program to protect against liver disease and cancer.

# It's official. We're the best practice in the state



Springs Medical has been named this year's Victorian Practice of the Year. We're delighted our commitment and hard work has won this important recognition for our patients and community.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) announced the award in June. Springs Medical was nominated for the award after we were recognised as an exceptional practice during an external accreditation assessment in May.

Springs Board Chair Dr Gerard Ingham says the award is important recognition for the practice's effort and focus to provide the highest quality of health care.

'It takes years of dedicated hard work and resources to achieve such a high standard,' he says.

'Because we are the only practice in Daylesford and Trentham, the high standard

of care Springs Medical provides is all that many in our community know. They may be unaware of the exceptional quality. This award makes it clear – our community has the best general practice in the state.'

Springs General Manager Lynda Poke says Clinical Team Leader, Jo Millard and Practice Coordinator, Emma Johns worked tirelessly to ensure the systems and processes would not only meet the standard required to maintain accreditation but in most cases exceed it.

'To have an independent assessor visit our practice and recognise the exceptional service we all give to our community should make us extremely proud of what we have achieved as a team,' she says.

Lynda says the practice is not planning to rest on its laurels. 'If anything, this award has only sparked more conversations about new ways to improve on the service and care given to the Hepburn Shire community.'

Newsletter by:



Medical Subeditor: Dr Jon Barrell, Director, Springs Medical

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To receive our newsletter via email, subscribe to our mailing list via our website.



For your convenience, additional appointments available now at our Daylesford Clinic.

**Evening Clinics: Each Monday & Wednesday until 7pm. Saturday Morning Clinic: 9am - 12.30pm.**



For more information, visit our website  
[www.springsmedical.com.au](http://www.springsmedical.com.au)

**In an emergency always call 000**

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