

New vaccine available for meningitis B: BEXSERO

A vaccine is now available to protect children and adults from meningococcal meningitis.

The group B meningitis bacteria can cause severe meningitis and septicaemia. In its early stages the symptoms may mimic flu and the classical rash is sometimes not present, making it difficult to diagnose. Symptoms may then rapidly worsen and complications may result in deafness, brain damage, loss of limbs or death. The introduction of this vaccine is therefore very welcome and immunisation should provide good protection against the disease.

Current recommendations are as follows:

Infants (2 to 5 months) should receive 3 injections, 1 month apart, with a subsequent booster (the timing of which is yet to be decided).

Children aged 5 months to 2 years receive 2 injections (at least 2 months apart) with a booster as for infants.

Children aged 2 to 11 years have 2 injections at least 2 months apart.

Children over 11 and adults have 2 injections at least 1 month apart.

There is, at present, no information on its use in adults over 50.

Common side effects include: fever, rash, irritability, local pain and redness at injection site, headaches, nausea. These appear to be no more or less common than for other vaccines given to children or adults.

The vaccine is inactivated (ie not "live"), contains minimal amounts of aluminium and possibly kanamycin, and the stopper for the vaccine bottle contains latex.

The vaccine is manufactured by Novartis and a full Product Information Leaflet is downloadable from my website.

Each vaccine costs £130.