

Improved meningitis vaccine may be on the way

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A new vaccine recommended by independent advisers to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention could provide more

comprehensive protection from meningitis.

The shot would protect against five types of bacteria causing meningococcal disease, one more than now covered in a single [vaccine](#), CNN reported.

The CDC is weighing the advisers' recommendation.

That news is welcome to Patti Wukovits, whose 17-year-old daughter Kimberly Coffey, quickly died from meningitis in June 2012.

"Our whole world changed," Wukovits told CNN. "There's not one day, one hour that goes by that I really don't think about her. She's always on top of my mind."

Kimberly had received the existing MenACWY vaccine, which protects against four types of bacteria that are in wide circulation.

But she died from meningitis B, which wasn't covered in that shot. At that time there was no vaccine to protect her from that bacteria type.

Today, a separate vaccine, MenB, covers that type of bacteria.

Right now, to be protected against all five bacteria types, a person would need four or five shots—two for MenACWY at age 11 or 12 and again at 16, and a MenB shot between 16 and 18, CNN said.

[Penbraya](#) is the new meningococcal vaccine made by Pfizer, CNN reported.

The new vaccine, which requires CDC approval, would be for 16- to 23-year-olds who are healthy and those 10 and older who have increased risks. It consists of two doses, delivered six months apart.

"Penbraya, the first FDA-approved 5-in-1 meningococcal vaccine, provides adolescents and [young adults](#) in the U.S. with the most comprehensive protection available against the leading causes of meningococcal disease," Dr. Luis Jodar, Pfizer's chief medical affairs officer for vaccines, antivirals and evidence generation, said in a company statement.

He added that Penbraya could help simplify a complex vaccination schedule.

Only 30% of 17-year-olds now get one dose, according to a CDC presentation to the advisory committee.

"Complexity has [negative side effects](#)," said committee member Dr. Matt Daley, senior investigator, Institute for Health Research, Kaiser Permanente Colorado.

The advisory committee's vote to recommend the shot was 10 to 4, followed by a unanimous vote to add the vaccine to the Vaccines for Children administration plan, CNN reported.

Committee member Dr. Kathy Poehling, a professor of pediatrics and epidemiology and prevention at the Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., was among the no votes. It wasn't for lack of faith in the vaccine, she said.

"We know that there's been tremendous benefit from the vaccines that are being administered. And there's a lot more to learn," Poehling told CNN. "My vote no was because I wanted to vote for a little bit of a broader recommendation. I respect that of my colleagues and believe there are going to be many more conversations to come about meningococcal vaccines."

Meningococcal disease includes meningitis. Though uncommon, it can infect the lining of the brain and [spinal cord](#), causing death or lifelong medical problems. It can also lead to a serious blood infection called septicemia.

About 10% of meningitis cases are fatal, CNN reported.

Antibiotics can help, but only if the infection is caught very early. Symptoms include fever, headache, nausea or vomiting, trouble waking, stiff neck, skin rash, sensitivity to light and brain fog.

About one in 20 cases are related to an outbreak. This can happen when people are living in close quarters, as on college campuses.

"Today is a major turning point," Wukovits said.

"The availability of the pentavalent vaccine has the potential to completely change the landscape of meningitis vaccinations," she said.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [meningococcal disease](#).

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