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Premier of NSW

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MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE FREE MENINGOCOCCAL JABS FOR NSW STUDENTS

Thousands more NSW students will be offered the free meningococcal vaccine in the next 12 months to protect them against the debilitating disease.

As the NSW Government launches its awareness campaign this week, Premier Gladys Berejiklian today announced a further \$3.6 million to extend the NSW Meningococcal W Response Program, which has provided free vaccine to more than 200,000 teenagers to date.

The NSW Government has invested \$17 million into the statewide program since it was introduced in 2017 to protect teenagers against the rising threat of the W strain, which has an eight per cent mortality rate compared to four per cent for other strains.

“We’re urging parents of Year 10 and 11 students to take advantage of the free vaccine in the next two terms to give them long-term protection against four strains of this potentially fatal disease,” Ms Berejiklian said.

The Commonwealth Government does not currently fund the ACWY vaccine for adolescents under the National Immunisation Program, which is why the NSW Government has stepped in to deliver the vaccine.

The NSW Government is investing a record \$22.75 million in statewide immunisation programs this year. This includes \$3.5 million for free flu shots to children up to five years of age and a \$1.75 million immunisation and influenza prevention campaign.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard said the meningococcal vaccination program targets upper high school students as they are particularly vulnerable to the disease.

“Just one dose of this vaccine provides strong, long-term protection while building immunity in the community and helping prevent the spread of this crippling disease,” Mr Hazzard said.

Meningococcal W cases in NSW increased four-fold between 2014 and 2016 – a trend that was reversed after introducing the free vaccinations for students last year.

“This vaccine has the added benefit of protection against the A, C and Y strains, which don’t occur as frequently but have equally devastating consequences,” he said.

NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant said early treatment for meningococcal disease is vital.

“We’re heading towards early spring when people are most at risk and we tend to see a rise in case numbers,” Dr Chant said.

“If you experience symptoms including a sudden onset of fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, neck stiffness, joint pain or rash of red-purple spots, go straight to your nearest emergency department to seek help. Acting quickly can save your life.”

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