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A guide for people without a fully working spleen



Some people are born without a spleen, or their spleen does not work properly. Some people may also need to have their spleen removed (splenectomy) as a result of injury or disease.

People without a fully working spleen are at increased risk of some life threatening infections. The risk is small. It has been estimated that if a 100 people without a spleen were followed for 10 years, between 1 and 5 of them would develop a severe infection over this time.

What does the spleen do?

The spleen helps the body fight infections.

What should you do if you do not have a fully working spleen?

- Carry a card or wear an identifying bracelet or necklace to alert other people in an emergency.
- Make sure that your doctors, nurses and dentist know you do not have a fully working spleen. Remind your health professional at each contact, including NHS Direct Wales.
- Take antibiotics as recommended.
- Make sure you have had all the vaccines recommended as part of the routine UK schedule.

- Also make sure you have the extra vaccines and boosters recommended for people without a spleen or fully working spleen.
- If you are unsure of what vaccines you need or think you may have missed any, speak to your doctor or nurse.

Vaccines

It is important that all age groups are up to date with vaccines that are routinely offered to everyone in the UK for free by the NHS. Talk to your GP or practice nurse.

People without a fully working spleen should also receive extra doses of the following immunisations:

- Meningococcal B vaccine (MenB)
- Meningococcal ACWY conjugate vaccine (MenACWY)
- Pneumococcal vaccine
- Haemophilus influenza type b and Meningococcal C vaccine (Hib/MenC).

You also need influenza (flu) vaccine **every year**. The flu vaccine reduces your risk of catching flu, it is offered to people without a fully working spleen as they are at increased risk of the complications of flu.

Speak to your GP, Practice Nurse or Health Visitor so they can check if you need any of these additional vaccines.

Antibiotics

Long term use of antibiotics is recommended for some people whose spleen isn't working properly, especially those who are at higher risk of serious infections. You should take any antibiotics prescribed to you to help prevent infection. Let your doctor know if you experience any problems when taking them.

Infections in people without a fully working spleen can develop quickly. You should have a course of antibiotics to keep at home, to use immediately if you become ill or in an emergency before seeking urgent medical advice.

If you become ill

It is important to contact your doctor immediately if you become ill. Most illnesses can be dealt with as usual, but sometimes a fever, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain or rash may be the beginning of an infection, which can be more serious in anyone without a fully working spleen, so always get advice.

If you call NHS Direct Wales 0845 4647, tell them you do not have a working spleen.

Travelling

When travelling, you are at increased risk from a number of different infections, including malaria and other infectious diseases passed on by ticks or animal bites.

- If travelling abroad, trekking or camping, get advice from your GP, Practice Nurse or Travel Clinic well in advance.
- Specialist advice may be needed, as special precautions and extra vaccines may be necessary.
- Carry a course of antibiotics with you.
- If you become ill whilst travelling, get medical advice promptly.
- Animal bites (especially dog bites) should be treated urgently.
- Make sure that your travel insurance covers your health needs.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor or nurse or call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 4647** or visit www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/doityourself/vaccinations



To order more copies of this leaflet, email: hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk or telephone **0845 606 4050**.

This leaflet is produced by:

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Please tear out and keep in your wallet

IMPORTANT HEALTH INFORMATION

I have no functioning spleen



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I am susceptible to overwhelming infection, particularly pneumococcal infections. Please show this card to the nurse or doctor if I am taken ill.

ALWAYS CARRY THIS CARD WITH YOU

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Name: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____ Tel: _____

GP tel: _____ Hospital tel: _____

Name of antibiotic if taken regularly: _____

I have been immunised against: **Date(s) last given:**

Pneumococcal

Hib/MenC

Men B Men ACWY

Flu