Understanding Student Awareness and Attitudes Towards the MenB Vaccine

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What is this study about?
Meningococcal disease is a serious and sometimes life-threatening infection caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*. One group of these bacteria, known as MenB, is the leading cause of meningococcal disease in young adults. A MenB vaccine exists, but many university students do not know about it, are unsure whether they need it, or face barriers in getting it. This study aims to understand what students currently know, how they feel about the MenB vaccine, and what might help them make informed decisions about getting protected.

Why is this important?
Students are at higher risk of meningococcal disease because they often live in shared accommodation, mix with new people, and are highly social. Several cases and clusters of MenB disease have occurred among students at UK universities over the past few years, including recently at the University of Kent in Canterbury. Vaccination can greatly reduce the risk of MenB disease, but uptake is currently low. Understanding why will help universities, healthcare providers, and charities improve communication and support for students.

What will the study do?
The project uses two main approaches:
1. A large online survey with 1,000–1,500 university students across different year groups and subject areas. The survey will gather information about:
    - students' awareness of meningococcal disease
    - what they know about the MenB vaccine
    - how concerned they feel about the illness
    - whether they would consider getting vaccinated
    - practical factors like cost, access, and availability

The survey will also include short educational messages about meningococcal disease and vaccines. We will look at how these brief prompts affect students' attitudes, understanding, and intentions.

2. Qualitative interviews (20–30 students), where participants will talk in more depth about:
    - concerns about safety or side effects
    - financial barriers
    - trust in health information
    - previous experiences with vaccines
    - what might help or encourage them to take action

What framework guides the study?
We will use the COM B behaviour-change model, which suggests that people need:
    - Capability (knowledge and understanding)

- Opportunity (practical access and affordability)
- Motivation (beliefs and attitudes)

By mapping our findings onto the COM B components, we can identify clear, evidence-based recommendations for improving vaccine uptake.

What will the study achieve?
The findings will help develop:

- clearer, more engaging pre-arrival information for new students
- better cues to action (e.g., reminders, prompts, signposting)
- practical improvements in access and affordability
- tailored behaviour-change strategies to support informed decision making

This project will help protect students' health and reduce the risk of meningococcal disease by supporting better awareness and uptake of the MenB vaccine, and will be of interest to various stakeholders, including academic microbiologists, clinicians, public health organisations, and vaccine companies.

What will be the study duration and what will be the approximate costs?
The study duration will be 12 months.

Major cost elements would likely include:

- Level 4 Research Associate (0.6 FTE ~ £25k) to undertake tasks such as ethics submission & participant materials, survey programming/piloting, recruitment coordination, qualitative interview scheduling & support, initial transcription cleaning, preparation of datasets for analysis, thematic & descriptive statistical analysis.
- Recruitment (~£3k) via incentives or external panels. Recruiting a sufficiently large and diverse sample of students ensures statistical validity and representation across faculties, year groups, and demographic groups. Incentives increase response rates and reduce selection bias.
- Qualitative Interviews & Transcription (~£1.5k) utilizing vouchers (£20/participant) to compensate students for their time for interviews and encourage participation among underrepresented groups. Automated or hybrid transcription provides accurate, efficient handling of audio data needed for rapid qualitative analysis.
- Software & Data Management (~£1k) using NVivo to support coding and analysis of interview transcripts. Secure storage ensures compliance with GDPR and university requirements and is necessary to manage sensitive student data appropriately.

Therefore, the estimated total cost of the project would be ~£30,000.