



FALL NEWSLETTER

Are Your Adolescent Children Up-To-Date on Their Immunizations? Ask about Meningococcal Vaccination

With school in session and extracurricular activities underway, fall is a busy time for most families. In the hustle and bustle of back-to-school shopping and class registration, did you remember to check whether your adolescents are up-to-date on recommended immunizations? One very important vaccination health officials recommend protects against a potentially fatal form of meningitis called meningococcal disease. It's recommended for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, ideally at their 11-12 year-old checkup.

Although it is rare, meningococcal disease can kill an otherwise healthy child within 48 hours of the first symptoms. For those who survive, up to two in ten will suffer permanent disabilities such as brain damage, deafness or limb amputations. Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for the disease. Vaccination can help prevent the majority of cases among this age group.

Health officials believe the increased risk in adolescents and young adults is connected to activities, such as living in a dormitory or boarding school or participating on sports teams, that put them in long-term, close contact with others who may carry the deadly bacteria. Bacteria that cause meningococcal disease are spread more easily in close-contact environments or by direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of an infected person, e.g., through coughing, sneezing or kissing.

For families who have experienced the disease, the effects can be devastating. "My son Evan, a healthy, active 19-year-old college junior, died needlessly from meningococcal disease. No one ever told me about vaccination. If they had, my son would have been immunized, and would be alive today," said Lynn Bozof, President, National Meningitis Association. "Parents need to know about meningococcal disease and understand that it can be prevented. No parent should ever have to lose a child to a vaccine-preventable disease."

The number of meningococcal disease cases changes from year to year. From 1998-2007, about 1,500 Americans were infected each year and one in nine died. Among adolescents and young adults about one in seven died.

Early symptoms of meningococcal disease often mimic those of the flu, including fever, headache, fatigue, muscle aches and stiff neck, making it difficult to identify and diagnose. Due to the fast moving nature of this disease and potentially devastating outcomes, prevention is critical.

"Immunization is the most effective way to prevent this disease among adolescents and young adults," said Susan J. Rehm, MD, Medical Director, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. "Vaccination protects against four of the five most common types of meningococcal bacteria that circulate in the United States."

For more information on vaccines recommended for adolescents, please visit www.adolescentvaccination.org.

If you have a child who is 11 to 18 years old, please contact us for more information or to schedule a vaccination appointment.



A public education initiative brought to you by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases in collaboration with leading healthcare organizations. The goals of this program are supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information and a list of supporting organizations and additional resource materials, please visit, <http://stopmeningitis.nfidinitiatives.org>.