National Meningitis Association Statement on Guillain-Barré Syndrome Alert

Meningococcal disease, or meningitis, is a serious bacterial infection that can lead to death or serious complications, like hearing loss, brain damage or limb amputations.

In April 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported eight cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) following administration of Menactra meningococcal vaccine (within two to five weeks of inoculation). According to the CDC, at this point there is insufficient data to show a causal link between GBS and Menactra, and the agency continues to recommend meningococcal disease vaccination as indicated in its routine immunization schedule.

The CDC reports the eight cases are out of a total of about 3.8 million doses of the vaccine that were distributed between March 2005 and February 2006. The agency said the rate of GBS among vaccine recipients is about the same that would be expected in the general population not being vaccinated.

Health officials continue to monitor the situation and have asked health care providers to be alert and report any additional cases of GBS.

As parents of children who have died or suffered permanent disabilities as a result of meningococcal meningitis, NMA feels it is important families to learn about this devastating disease and prevention methods in order to make informed medical decisions about immunization.

GBS is a rare neurological disorder, in which the body's immune system attacks part of the peripheral nervous system. The disorder is characterized by a loss of reflexes and temporary paralysis usually beginning in the legs and moving to the upper body. According to the CDC, the syndrome is rare, affecting about one person in 100,000 per year.

For more information parents should speak with their child's physician or contact the CDC or Food and Drug Administration.