



## GENERAL MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE AWARENESS PROGRAM FOR PTAs

The PTA is committed to making a difference and is an important voice for children, resource for parents and advocate for public education. The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is dedicated to educating families and others about preventing meningococcal disease, commonly called meningococcal meningitis, a rare, potentially fatal disease.

Together, both organizations can help ensure parents and other community advocates are educated about the increased risk among adolescents and young adults for contracting meningococcal meningitis and informed about the benefits of immunization.

NMA invites PTAs to consider using this specially designed program, called *Parent Teacher Awareness Program: Educating About Adolescent Meningitis Prevention*. The program features a variety of resource materials for free and unrestricted use by PTA chapters to help communicate important disease and prevention messages to their respective schools and communities.

### **Adolescents and Young Adults at Increased Risk**

Each year meningococcal disease strikes an average of 1,500 Americans, with a range of 900 to nearly 3,000 cases annually. Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk of contracting meningococcal disease compared to the general population, accounting for nearly 15 percent of all U.S. cases annually. This age group also has a higher death rate. As many as one out of every seven adolescents infected with the disease died and approximately 20 percent of survivors endure permanent disabilities, including brain damage, hearing loss, loss of kidney function and limb amputations. However, the majority of meningococcal meningitis cases occurring among adolescents and young adults may be prevented through immunization. The disease is transmitted through air droplets and direct contact with infected persons (e.g., coughing, kissing).

Meningococcal conjugate vaccines are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use among persons aged 2 to 55 years.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal immunization for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, ideally at their 11-12 year-old check-up. Meningococcal vaccination is also recommended for other people at increased risk for meningococcal disease, including college freshmen living in dormitories. For more information on CDC recommendations, visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/meningitis/vaccine-info.html>.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American College Health Association also support similar recommendations for adolescents and college students.

### **Parent Teacher Awareness Program**

Materials in the *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* are designed to provide PTA organizations with sample communications materials and suggested strategies for generating awareness about meningococcal meningitis and prevention approaches to the disease.

The program offers suggestions on how to effectively use the materials in your school district to reach key audiences – parents, school administration/officials (e.g., principals, superintendents, school nurses) and the community at large.

Additionally, the program includes a separate Meningococcal Meningitis Vaccination Clinic Resource Guide on conducting vaccine clinics, should your school/district be interested in helping to provide the community with an additional opportunity to be immunized.

### **Resource Materials**

Materials included in the *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* are designed in a “turnkey” or template format – meaning each document features text indicated in brackets e.g., [INCLUDE NAME OF SCHOOL HERE] that can be customized with your PTA/district’s name, address, contact information and other helpful information.

Electronic copies of the materials are available for downloading on the NMA website, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org). Components can be easily reproduced or photocopied for distribution.

The *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* includes the following resource materials:

#### ***Sample School Administration Letter***

The sample school administration letter can be sent by the PTA, along with information on meningococcal disease, to encourage the school administration/Board of Education to help in your efforts to educate parents about the risk of meningococcal meningitis and benefits of immunization.

#### ***Sample Parent/Student Letter***

The sample parent/student letter can be sent along with information on meningococcal disease and immunization. This information can be mailed from the PTA or school/district administration to parents in the late summer or early fall, in time for physicals.

#### ***Meningococcal Disease Fact Sheet and Informational Flyer***

These materials provide information about meningococcal disease, the risk among adolescents and young adults and immunization in an easy-to-read format. The documents, which summarize how the disease is transmitted, its symptoms, incidence and prevention approaches, can be distributed to a variety of audiences including parents, school officials and media or posted on bulletin boards throughout the school and in the school nurse’s office.

#### ***Meningococcal Disease Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document***

The FAQ document provides background information about meningococcal disease, immunization and health official vaccination recommendations. This document can be a resource for the PTA in answering questions from parents or school officials about meningococcal meningitis or distributed to a variety of audiences, including parents and students, school officials and media.

#### ***Sample Press Release***

Media can play an important role in notifying parents, students and local health professionals/organizations about meningococcal meningitis. The sample press release can be tailored to

include information about meningococcal disease and immunization, while positioning PTA as a community leader and providing contact information for the NMA, as a resource for additional disease information.

### ***Sample Public Service Announcement (PSA) Script***

The PSA scripts are intended to provide the public with a brief snapshot of meningococcal meningitis and benefits of immunization. Radio stations read public service announcements at no cost due to the educational nature of the information. The PSA script can be customized and distributed to local radio stations by the PTA. They are designed as “live copy,” to be read or recorded by a radio announcer or personality.

### ***NMA Brochure***

A copy of the NMA’s tri-fold brochure, “Meningococcal Meningitis: Possible to Prevent. Dangerous to Ignore,” is designed to educate the public about meningococcal meningitis, the risk among adolescents and young adults, symptoms, vaccination recommendations and prevention approaches.

Enclosed you also will find a form your PTA can use to order additional copies directly from NMA for distribution to parents, school administration/officials and media via parent/teacher night and direct mailings. NMA requests a small donation for brochures ordered to cover shipping/handling expenses incurred.

### **Suggested PTA Awareness Activities**

PTA groups may want to consider using the program’s communications and resource materials to design activities to generate awareness about meningococcal disease and benefits of immunization that reach a variety of key audiences – parents, school administration, local media and the community.

Below are suggested approaches geared toward reaching these key audiences. Materials included in the *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* can be used in implementing these suggestions.

### ***Parent Mailings***

One of the most direct methods to reach parents and inform them of health issues is through direct mailings prior to the start of the new school year. Timing is critical, as the beginning of the school year is typically when parents bring their children to the pediatrician’s office. These mailings can be coupled with other school announcements or calendar mailings, or as a stand-alone piece.

The following materials can be tailored to your school/school district and included in the mailing:

- Parent letter
- Meningococcal disease fact sheet
- NMA brochure

### ***Local Media Communications***

Regional and local media (newspapers, radio stations, television broadcast outlets) can be a significant information source for parents, as they often cover health-related stories affecting the community. Additionally, the media also can be a good resource for reaching other key audiences, such as school administrators, physicians and public health officials.

The media materials included in the *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* are provided in a format that allows you to adapt them to include information specific to your PTA or school/school district.

Suggested communication activities include:

- Distribute press release to regional and local media: Customize the sample press release to include information specific to your PTA, school or district. The press release should be sent to editors of local newspapers and publications. Names of appropriate contacts at these newspapers can usually be found on the publication's website. If you are unable to locate this information online, you may want to scan the bylines in your local paper and send the press release to the health reporter listed.
- Distribute PSA to local broadcast outlets: Tailor the PSA script provided in this resource guide and forward to public service directors or public affairs producers at local radio and television broadcast stations. Encourage your local radio/television stations to air a PSA to inform and educate parents about the increased risk among adolescents and young adults for meningococcal disease, immunization recommendations and vaccine availability. Again, names of appropriate contacts to send such material can usually be found on the outlet's website. We recommend following up with a telephone call to encourage airing.
- Include fact sheets, background materials: Be sure to also include the meningococcal disease fact sheet, informational flyer and FAQ document to provide background information and help better explain the risk among adolescents and young adults and prevention approaches to the disease.

### ***Parent/Teacher Night***

Parent/Teacher Nights are a good opportunity to get information about meningitis and immunization in the hands of parents and encourage them to speak with their child's physician about the disease and vaccine. Additionally, as several PTA groups already have a presence during the Parent/Teacher Night at their schools, this can be an add-on to the pre-existing activities the PTA will be taking on that evening.

We recommend setting up a table during Parent/Teacher Night, either near the nurse's office, should they have questions about the disease or immunization to ask the school nurse, or by the entrance to ensure they receive the information. The following materials can be tailored to your school/school district and made available at the PTA table:

- Meningococcal disease fact sheet
- Meningococcal disease FAQ document
- NMA brochure

To generate additional awareness during Parent/Teacher Night, we recommend posting the meningococcal disease informational flyer around the school on bulletin boards and near high traffic areas, such as the cafeteria, water fountains and restrooms.

### ***Board of Education Meetings***

Your PTA/school district's Board of Education meeting is a good resource to help broaden your efforts to other schools within your district. Your PTA on its own, or by partnering with other PTA groups, can encourage your district to educate a broad range of parents about the risk of meningococcal disease, so

they can make educated decisions about immunization for their children. We recommend the following approach to most effectively reach the Board of Education:

- Send letter to school officials/superintendent: Customize the sample school administration letter to include information specific to your PTA, school or district to encourage the Board of Education to alert parents to the disease and availability of the vaccine. The letter can be sent along with the meningococcal disease fact sheet, FAQ document or NMA brochure to provide background information about the disease and vaccine. The letter also can be tailored to be sent to other PTA groups within your community to generate additional support.
- Attend Board of Education meeting: A representative from your PTA, or several PTAs among the community, can attend a Board of Education meeting and speak during the public comment session to urge the Board to alert parents to the dangers of meningococcal disease and benefits of immunization.

### ***Vaccination Clinics at Schools***

A number of middle and high schools have conducted and/or are implementing vaccination clinics during school hours, where parents can obtain information about the disease, as well as provide their children with the meningococcal vaccine. These are great opportunities to offer vaccinations for other diseases as well, including influenza.

For PTAs and schools/districts that choose to conduct vaccination clinics, please see the Meningococcal Disease Vaccine Clinic Resource Guide available on the NMA website, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).

### ***Meningitis Awareness Bracelets***

As a fundraising opportunity PTAs can sell NMA's meningitis awareness bracelets. Each bracelet is \$1 and helps NMA raise funds to support its mission. PTAs can elect to sell the bracelets for an additional cost as a school fundraising event. For more information visit NMA's website, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).

### ***More Information***

For more information about the *Parent Teacher Awareness Program* and/or information about the National Meningitis Association, its activities, meningococcal disease or prevention approaches, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA or visit [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).