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**PARENTS JOIN FIGHT AGAINST MENINGOCOCCAL MENINGITIS
IN NEWLY FORMED NATIONAL PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN
CALLED MOMS ON MENINGITIS (M.O.M.S)**

*National Meningitis Association's New Initiative Aims to Increase Parents' Awareness about
Potentially Deadly Meningitis and Encourage Vaccination*

LEXINGTON PARK, MD – MAY 27 – The National Meningitis Association (NMA) today launched a national public awareness campaign that targets parents of college students with information about the dangers of meningitis and urges vaccination before children head off to campus. The campaign, called “Moms on Meningitis” (or M.O.M.s), is a coalition of mothers from across the United States whose college-age children suffered permanent disability or died from meningococcal meningitis.

Meningococcal meningitis strikes about 2,500 Americans each year, leading to death in approximately 10 to 15 percent of the cases. Of those who survive, nearly 20 percent suffer permanent disability such as brain damage, hearing loss, and limb amputations. Studies show college students, especially freshmen living in dormitories, are at increased risk of contracting meningococcal meningitis. Up to 80 percent of cases that occur on college campuses are vaccine preventable.

“We hope this awareness campaign will encourage parents to immunize their college-bound children against meningococcal meningitis,” said Lynn Bozof, the executive director of NMA and a mother who lost a child to the disease when he was a junior in college.

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Like most of the parents involved in the campaign, Mrs. Bozof was unaware college students are at increased risk for meningococcal meningitis or that vaccination could have protected her son, Evan. “No parent should have to watch a child become permanently disfigured or die from this disease. Immunization has been around for years.”

Health officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics and American College Health Association recommend that parents and students be informed of the risk of meningococcal meningitis and the benefits of immunization.

Parents affiliated with the M.O.M.s campaign are part of a national media effort aimed at reaching other parents via print, television and radio interviews. NMA has also developed a consumer brochure, called “Meningitis on Campus: Don’t Wait. Vaccinate” as well as national television and radio public service announcements, featuring compelling, tragic personal stories about the potentially devastating effects of meningitis.

Other parents associated with the M.O.M.s campaign include Candie Benn of San Diego, California, whose daughter Melanie survived the disease as a freshman student but had to have her arms and legs amputated to save her life. Judy Miller of Coal City, Illinois, lost her daughter, Beth, in 1999 to meningococcal meningitis during her sophomore year. From Carmel, New York, Paige Kach’s son, John, survived the disease in 2000, but doctors had to amputate one of his legs below the knee as well as remove his fingers and remaining toes to help save his life.

Another mother, Deb Kepferle of Lexington Park, Maryland, knew the meningococcal vaccine was recommended for her son, Patrick. However, when her son went for a pre-college physical, his doctor did not carry the vaccine. Patrick contracted meningococcal meningitis as a freshman and died in less than 24 hours of his symptoms.

“Parents must be insistent about protecting their children,” said Mrs. Kepferle. “If your doctor doesn’t carry the vaccine, check with other area doctors or your local public health department. Get your children immunized *before* they go to college.”

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Certain lifestyle factors common among college living appear to be linked to the disease, including communal living, bar patronage, smoking and irregular sleep patterns. Meningococcal meningitis is transmitted through the exchange of air droplets in respiratory secretions (e.g. coughing, kissing, sharing a drinking glass or utensil, etc).

The disease often is misdiagnosed as something less serious, as symptoms resemble the flu, including: fever, severe headache, stiff neck, nausea, etc. Left untreated, the infection can progress rapidly within hours of the first symptoms, and lead to death or permanent disability.

Vaccination is safe and effective, providing protection against four of the five types of the bacteria that cause disease in the U.S. These four serogroups account for up to 80 percent of cases of meningococcal meningitis among college students.

Parents in the M.O.M.s campaign are also featured on NMA's web site, www.nmaus.org.

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The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is a nonprofit organization founded to inform families, medical professionals, and others about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and methods of prevention. NMA's mission is to help ensure every child is offered protection from the disease through vaccination programs; to support research and development of improved meningitis vaccines and treatments for people stricken by meningitis; and to provide support to survivors of meningococcal meningitis and meningococemia and their families. For more information about NMA and its activities, or to contact a member of NMA, please call 1-866-FONE-NMA (1-866-366-3662) or visit www.nmaus.org.