

The National Meningitis Association Supports CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ Permissive Recommendation of Serogroup B Meningococcal Vaccination for Teens and Young Adults

Atlanta, GA, June 24 – Earlier today, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted for permissive use of serogroup B meningococcal vaccine for adolescents 16 to 23 years of age, with a preferred age of 16-18. This recommendation allows them and their parents to decide, in collaboration with their healthcare professionals, if they wish to be immunized. This recommendation also paves the way for coverage of the vaccine by private and public health insurance, including the Vaccines for Children Program (VFC).

Serogroup B is the most common cause of meningococcal disease in adolescents, with the risk of disease increasing in college-aged adolescents and young adults. The recommendation includes all 16- to 23-year olds because incidence is increased in this age group regardless of college enrollment. However, in the past two years, four outbreaks and many individual cases of serogroup B occurred on [college campuses](#), which have heightened concern among college health officials.

“Today’s decision will help parents and healthcare professionals protect our children from all forms of meningitis by providing access to the vaccines,” said Lynn Bozof, President of NMA. “While we would have preferred a routine recommendation, the permissive recommendation, if accepted by CDC, will ensure these vaccines are covered by private and public insurance, including the VFC program, and medical practices will be more likely to stock and administer them.”

Currently the CDC recommends routine vaccination against four of the five major strains of the disease (A, C, W and Y). NMA plans to conduct outreach to educate parents and older adolescents about the importance of asking healthcare professionals about the serogroup B vaccine, as they may mistakenly believe they are already protected against this strain.

NMA Has a Strong Presence at ACIP Meeting

During the meeting, NMA M.O.M.s (Moms on Meningitis) and T.E.A.M. members (Together Educating About Meningitis) provided oral and written testimony and urged the committee to expand adolescent vaccine recommendations to include serogroup B vaccines.

More than 1,200 people representing all 50 states signed an open letter that NMA submitted to the committee in support of a recommendation to protect adolescents from serogroup B disease. Signatories included healthcare professionals, college health professionals, parents of young adults, college students, individuals touched by this disease and others who support prevention.

The following NMA representatives who lost loved ones, who might be alive today if the B vaccines were available earlier, provided oral testimony to the committee during today’s meeting:

- **Mike Barnes’** 20-year-old son Jimmy died just four months ago: “Jimmy made the world brighter for us. His light is out and we wonder if the world will ever be as bright again. ACIP has the ability to make sure no other parent has to share a story of how their son or daughter died of bacterial meningitis.”

- **Laurie Stelzer** lost her 18-year-old daughter Sara, a sophomore at San Diego State University, in October 2014: “I took her for all her recommended vaccines before college. We got everything that they told us to. At that time, serogroup B vaccines weren’t approved. Sara was just beginning her life and we expected a great future for her. Serogroup B meningococcal disease stole that. While this comes too late for Sara, I’m grateful other adolescents can be protected.”
- **Jackie Ross** lost her 19-year-old sister Stephanie, a student at Drexel University, in March 2014: “In the span of a few hours, I lost my only sister, my mentor, my best friend. I don’t want that to happen to anyone else especially when the solution is within our reach.”
- **Lucia Jaime**, whose 19-year-old sister Andrea was a student at Georgetown University when she died in September 2014: “As college students, we were not aware of this disease. My sister and I just assumed we were protected. Unless a doctor specifically recommends a vaccine, college students are not likely to get it or know to ask about it.”

Education about Prevention and Symptoms is Critical

This recommendation is a step forward, but more work is needed to make sure all adolescents are fully vaccinated against meningococcal disease. It is extremely important for parents and healthcare professionals to be aware of available vaccination options.

Education of parents, teens, healthcare professionals and college administrators is critical in order to increase vaccine uptake. Parents clearly want their teens vaccinated against meningitis since 80 percent receive the first A, C, W and Y dose recommended at 11 to 12 years of age. Many parents are not aware that the booster dose at age 16 is essential to protect teens in later years when rates of infection begin to climb. Now education by NMA advocates can serve a two-fold purpose – educating parents and teens about the booster at age 16 to protect against A, C, W and Y and making sure they know to talk to their healthcare professional about the B vaccine for ages 16 to 23.

Parents and healthcare professionals should also be aware of [meningococcal disease symptoms](#) so they can better recognize the disease. Although it is rare, meningococcal disease can come on quickly and can lead to death or disability within hours. While vaccines offer the best chance of protection against the infection, they are not 100 percent effective, and knowledge of symptoms can help ensure prompt medical treatment is sought if needed.

About NMA

NMA works to protect families from the potentially devastating effects of meningococcal disease by educating the public, medical professionals and others about the disease and its prevention. The NMA network also provides critical emotional support for families who have been affected by meningococcal disease. Visit NMA at www.nmaus.org, watch NMA’s PSA “[The Right Thing to Do](#),” and find us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

Media Requests

To speak with an NMA representative who has been affected by meningococcal disease, please contact us at lynn.nma@gmail.com, 678-779-3370 or 212-886-2219.