

Health Awareness

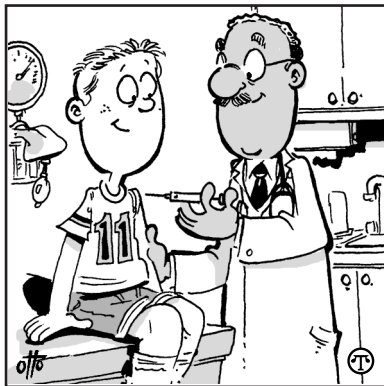
Protect Your Adolescents Against More Than Just A Cold This Winter *Late-Winter, Early-Spring Is Meningitis Peak Season*

(NAPSA)—As a parent, you often take extra health precautions to protect your child from “winter illnesses” such as colds and the flu, but one preventative health measure you may not know about is vaccination against meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease, commonly called meningitis, is a potentially deadly bacterial infection that can strike adolescents and young adults. The disease moves quickly and can lead to death or permanent disability, such as brain damage, organ failure or limb amputations, within hours of first symptoms. While meningococcal disease can occur at any point throughout the year, cases peak in the late-winter and early-spring months reinforcing the importance of seeking vaccination this time of year rather than waiting for back-to-school physicals.

To help prevent infection, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends meningococcal vaccination for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age and college students living in dormitories. Yet, according to a recent national consumer awareness survey conducted by the National Meningitis Association (NMA), nearly half of parents polled were not aware that their adolescent children were recommended for vaccination.

“It’s unfortunate how many



A simple vaccination can help protect adolescents and teens against a deadly disease.

parents don’t know about meningococcal disease or that there is a vaccine available that can help protect their children,” said Tama Lee, Director of the National Meningitis Association. “I lost my son, Casey, to meningococcal disease when he was in high school, and it wasn’t until after he died that I learned his death may have been prevented with a simple vaccination.”

Meningococcal disease is spread through air droplets and direct contact with those who are infected, such as through coughing or kissing. The disease strikes nearly 3,000 Americans each year and can be easily misdiagnosed since symptoms often mimic those of the flu. Early symptoms may include high fever, headache, stiff

neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. In later stages, a rash may appear.

Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for the disease and account for nearly 30 percent of all U.S. cases. Certain lifestyle factors, such as dormitory-style living, prolonged close contact with large groups of other adolescents, irregular sleep patterns and active or passive smoking, are thought to put adolescents at increased risk for the infection. However, the majority of cases among adolescents and young adults are potentially vaccine-preventable.

While there are steps your children can take to help protect themselves, such as getting enough rest and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, vaccination is the best way to prevent meningococcal disease. The meningococcal vaccine protects against four of the five major strains of the disease.

“With meningitis peak season upon us, I encourage all parents of adolescents and young adults to learn about the disease and to talk to their child’s health care provider about meningococcal vaccination,” said Tama Lee. “Don’t wait. Any time your child visits the doctor is a good opportunity to have this discussion.”

For more information about NMA or meningococcal disease, please visit www.nmaus.org.