

Health Alert

Meningococcal Vaccination Urged For Summer Campers

(NAPSA)—Parents are urged by school nurses and camps nationwide to help protect their children against meningitis this summer by getting them vaccinated.

Public health officials agree that preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age and college freshmen living in dormitories should be vaccinated against meningococcal disease, a serious infection that can cause meningitis and take the life of a child in just a single day.

While meningitis is rare, conditions at camps—living in close quarters, as well as sharing water bottles, drinking glasses and kissing—can put even healthy kids at risk for getting the disease. The National Association of School Nurses' (NASN) *Voices of Meningitis* campaign aims to educate parents about the importance of prevention.

"Don't be afraid to send your child to camp, but be educated about meningitis," said Nina Fekaris, RN, NCSN, NASN board of director. "Just as parents get sunscreen and bug repellent to help protect their children during the summer months, they should consider vaccination against meningitis, too."

About 10 percent of the 1,000 to 2,600 Americans who get meningococcal meningitis each year will die. Of those who survive, 1 in 5 is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of limbs, brain damage, deafness and organ damage.

Shara Ludlum is reminded of meningitis every summer. In June 2008, Shara's 10-year-old son Tyler contracted meningitis.



Add meningitis vaccination to your summer camp checklist.

Within hours of his first symptoms, Tyler was in critical condition, and doctors were forced to amputate his feet and fingers on his right hand in order to save his life. Shara and Tyler have joined school nurses nationwide for the *Voices of Meningitis* campaign to share their story and help raise awareness about the disease and importance of vaccination.

"I learned about vaccination after my son got sick," said Shara. "Don't think this can't happen to you. Vaccination should be a priority on every parent's summer 'to-do' list."

Preventing meningitis is particularly important because the disease moves quickly and can be hard to recognize, especially in its early stages because symptoms are similar to those of the flu. "I urge parents to make sure their children have received all recommended vaccines, including the meningitis vaccine, before going to camp or participating in other summer activities that bring groups of preteens and teens together," said Fekaris.

Visit www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org and talk to your child's school, camp nurse or other health-care provider about vaccination.