

Parents Urged To Immunize Teens During Meningitis Peak Season

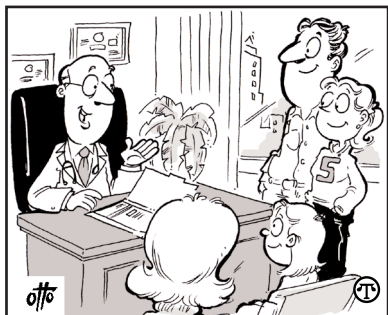
(NAPSA)—Late winter and early spring is peak season for meningococcal disease, a devastating bacterial infection that can affect teens, young adults and college students. The National Meningitis Association (NMA) urges parents to talk to their child's physician about meningococcal disease prevention, including immunization.

Lynn Bozof, executive director of the NMA, lost her son Evan to meningococcal disease and did not realize the severity of the disease or know there was a vaccine.

"Most meningococcal disease cases occur in late winter and early spring, so it's important during this time for parents to become aware of the disease and vaccination," says Bozof. "Many parents consider vaccination for their children during back-to-school doctor's visits or when preparing college-aged children to live on campus; however, meningococcal disease can hit throughout the year."

This vaccine-preventable disease, also called meningitis, is transmitted through respiratory secretions, kissing or sharing glasses. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends routine immunization for 11- to 12-year-olds, for those about to enter high school (at about age 15) or for college freshmen if living in dormitories.

Nearly 30 percent of all cases in the U.S. occur among adolescents and young adults. One study shows that this age group has an unusually high death rate from the disease—one in four may die. Immu-



nization can prevent up to 83 percent of disease cases among this group.

"It is important for parents to learn about meningococcal disease and to be proactive in their child's health. Parents need to take advantage of the ample vaccine supply and ensure their children get vaccinated today," urges Bozof.

Meningococcal disease, often mistaken for the flu, can progress within hours, potentially resulting in serious or fatal consequences, including brain damage, limb amputations or death.

Early symptoms of the disease include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion and rash. Living in dormitories, participating in sleep-away camps, and irregular sleep patterns may increase the risk of contracting the disease among adolescents and young adults.

Vaccination is highly effective against four out of the five major strains of the disease and has minimal side effects, mostly soreness from the shot or mild fever.

Teens can help reduce their risk of contracting the disease by not sharing utensils and water bottles.

To learn more, you can visit