



National Association of School Nurses

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SCHOOL NURSES TACKLE LOW PARENTAL AWARENESS OF MENINGITIS VIA COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

- *National Association of School Nurses' new Voices of Meningitis initiative urges parents to vaccinate preteens and teens against meningococcal meningitis, a rare, but serious infection that can take the life of a child in just a single day*
- *Preteens and teens are at increased risk for meningococcal meningitis, and health officials recommend they get vaccinated*
- *Actress Lori Loughlin (the new 90210, Full House) adds her voice to the initiative as mom and national spokesperson*
- *Parents of children who have died and survivors of this serious disease share compelling personal stories to encourage families to consider vaccination*

New York, August 24, 2009 – School nurses and families affected by a potentially deadly form of meningitis today launched a national consumer education initiative, called *Voices of Meningitis*. The initiative strongly urges parents to vaccinate preteens and teens, who are at greater risk of getting meningococcal disease, including meningococcal meningitis—a rare, but serious bacterial infection.

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) has joined with parents, survivors of meningococcal meningitis, and actress and mother Lori Loughlin (the new *90210*, *Full House*) to increase awareness of this potentially devastating disease that can take the life of a child in just a single day.

“Many parents are unaware their preteen and teenage children are at risk for meningitis, and that vaccination is recommended to help protect preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age and college freshmen living in dormitories,” said Sandi Delack, president, National Association of School Nurses.

“School nurses are at the forefront of ensuring families in our communities know about meningococcal meningitis and vaccination—which is at the heart of our new *Voices of Meningitis* initiative,” said Delack. “The national campaign aims to educate parents of preteens and teens about this disease and the importance of prevention.”

Voices of Meningitis is a multi-year initiative comprising widespread national and regional awareness activities to encourage parents to consider vaccination for their preteen and teenage children. The initiative encompasses a multitude of national media and public service activities, including television and radio public service announcements featuring Lori Loughlin. The program also will equip thousands of school nurses throughout the U.S. with comprehensive messages and educational materials to reach communities with this important health message.

In addition, *Voices of Meningitis* offers a comprehensive Web site, www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org, where visitors can hear the compelling stories of families that have been personally affected by meningitis and access information about the disease and the importance of vaccination.

"Meningitis has cut short and devastated the lives of too many young people," said Lori Loughlin. "As a mother of three, I helped to protect my children against this disease by ensuring they were vaccinated. I urge other parents to help protect their children as well by talking to their child's school nurse about meningitis prevention or calling their health-care provider to schedule a vaccination appointment."

About Meningococcal Disease

Meningococcal disease, which includes meningitis, is a serious bacterial infection that strikes between 1,000 to 2,600 Americans each year. Although rare, meningococcal disease can cause meningitis (swelling of the brain or spinal cord) or meningococemia (blood infection). The disease can be spread through common everyday activities, such as sharing eating utensils and drinking glasses, living in close quarters like dormitories or summer camps, and kissing. Meningococcal disease can be hard to recognize, especially in its early stages, because symptoms are similar to those of more common viral illnesses. Unlike more common illnesses, the disease can progress quickly and may cause death or disability in just a single day.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical groups recommend meningococcal vaccination for preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age, college freshmen living in dormitories and children 2 through 10 years of age who are at increased risk or if elected by their health-care providers and parents.

Vaccines are available for people who wish to reduce their risk for contracting the disease.

About the National Association of School Nurses

The National Association of School Nurses is a non-profit specialty nursing organization, incorporated in 1977, which represents school nurses exclusively. NASN has over 13,000 members and 51 affiliates, including the District of Columbia and overseas. The mission of the NASN is "to advance the delivery of professional school health services to promote optimal health and learning in students."

For More Information

For more information about the *Voices of Meningitis* educational initiative, visit www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org. For information about the National Association of School Nurses, visit www.nasn.org or call 866-627-6767. For state specific information, select "Affiliate Organizations" under "QUICKLINKS" on the NASN homepage.

Voices of Meningitis is a program of the National Association of School Nurses in collaboration with sanofi pasteur, the vaccines division of sanofi-aventis Group.