



A Meningococcal Disease Prevention Campaign  
from the National Association of School Nurses

In collaboration with sanofi pasteur

## ***Voices of Meningitis* Back-to-School Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **School Nurses Call on Parents to Vaccinate their Preteens and Teens Against Meningococcal Meningitis Before School Year Begins**

*Vaccination rates are low, leaving millions unprotected*

NEW YORK, Aug. 18 – More than half of adolescents 13 to 17 years of age have not been vaccinated against meningococcal disease, a rare but serious disease that can cause meningitis and take the life of a child in just a single day. In a recent Ipsos national survey, the majority of mothers with children in this age group had not vaccinated their children because they were not fully aware of the need for vaccination. However, once they were informed of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) recommendation to vaccinate preteens and teens 11 to 18 years of age, nearly 90 percent said they were now likely to vaccinate their children.

The National Association of School Nurses’ (NASN) *Voices of Meningitis* campaign is encouraging families to add meningococcal vaccination to their back-to-school checklists. *Voices of Meningitis* is a public education initiative that brings together school nurses, parents, survivors of the disease and public health officials to share their experiences to help educate families with preteen and teenage children about the dangers of meningitis and importance of vaccination.

“As a school nurse and a mom myself, I am committed to keeping children healthy and ready to learn,” said Sandi Delack, RN, MEd, NCSN, president of the NASN and a school nurse for more than 20 years. “With another school year upon us, I have joined the NASN’s *Voices of Meningitis* program to call on all parents to have their children vaccinated against this potentially deadly disease. Every health-care visit, including back-to-school check-ups, is an opportunity to have your child vaccinated against meningitis.”

Preteens and teens are at a greater risk for getting meningitis and death rates from meningitis are up to five times higher among teens and young adults compared with other age groups. Everyday activities such as prolonged close contact among large groups of adolescents, sharing drinking glasses and kissing, can increase the risk for getting the disease.

#### *Meningitis can be Devastating*

Although rare, meningitis can kill or disable an otherwise healthy young person in just a single day. Of those who survive, one in five is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of limbs, brain damage, deafness and organ damage.

Olga Pasick lost her son, David, to meningococcal meningitis when he was 13 years of age, shortly after he started a new school year.

“David was a typical, outgoing and healthy teen. But one night in September, he had a high fever and was vomiting throughout the night,” said Olga. “The next morning, my husband and I took David to the pediatrician, who sent him straight to the emergency room. Our son died within hours. It was only after his death that I learned vaccination may have saved his life,” said Olga.

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[VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://VoicesOfMeningitis.org)



*National Association of School Nurses*

"If David had been vaccinated, he might still be here today. No parent should have to bury their child," said Olga. "I hope other families will learn from our story and have their children vaccinated before sending them back to school."

#### *Parents can Help Protect their Children by Getting them Vaccinated*

Vaccination against meningococcal disease has been recommended for years and is a safe and effective way to help protect against this disease. The CDC first recommended immunization of adolescents in 2005.

Visit [www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org) to learn more about meningococcal meningitis and vaccination and to hear the compelling stories of families and people who have been personally affected by meningitis.

#### **About the Survey**

The survey was conducted via Ipsos Public Affairs U.S. online panel, on behalf of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN), among a national sample of 1,009 mothers with children aged 11 to 18. Weighting was then employed to ensure that the sample's composition reflected that of the U.S. adult population. This survey carries a 95 percent confidence level.

#### **About *Voices of Meningitis***

*Voices of Meningitis* brings together many "voices" of meningitis – school nurses, parents whose children have been affected by the disease, survivors of meningococcal meningitis and public health professionals – to raise awareness about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and the importance of vaccination for preteen and teenage children.

*Voices of Meningitis* includes educational materials for the public and health-care providers, as well as a public service campaign featuring school nurses, disease survivors and families affected by meningitis. The campaign features a comprehensive website, [www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org), where visitors can hear the compelling stories of families that have been personally affected by meningitis and access educational information about the disease and the importance of vaccination. The campaign also includes a Facebook page, [Raise Your Voice Against Meningitis](#), where users can learn about the disease and pledge to vaccinate their children during National Immunization Awareness Month in August.

#### **About Meningococcal Disease**

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection that 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 overnight 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.

Public health officials 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 (NASN) is a non-profit specialty nursing organization, organized in 1968 and incorporated in 1977, representing school nurses exclusively. NASN has over 14,000 members and 51 affiliates, including the District of Columbia and overseas. The



mission of the NASN is “to improve the health and educational success of children and youth by developing and providing leadership to advance the school nursing practice.”

**For More Information**

For more information about the *Voices of Meningitis* educational initiative, visit [www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org). For information about the National Association of School Nurses, visit [www.nasn.org](http://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.

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