

ALERT TO THE COLLEGE PARENT



Mothers Group Warns Parents With College-Age Children: Don't Wait. Vaccinate Against Meningitis On Campus

(NAPS)—Five mothers from across the U.S. are fighting back against a deadly infectious disease that hits college students. They want to make sure other parents don't suffer the same tragedy by making sure their kids get vaccinated before heading to campus.

Each of the moms lost a child, or has a daughter or son living with permanent disabilities as a result of meningococcal meningitis, a potentially deadly bacterial infection that struck their children while they were away at college.

Three of the five mothers had children who died from this deadly campus killer. The other two stood by helplessly watching their children go through multiple amputations of their arms and legs to save their lives.

Before meningococcal meningitis touched their families, these mothers knew little or nothing about the disease or that college students are at greater risk.

They also didn't know the number of college-age cases has increased since the early 1990s.

They had no idea how contagious the disease is and that early symptoms mimic the flu—so much so that doctors often misdiagnose the disease as the flu and send students back to the dorm.

The mothers were also unaware that students who survive meningitis can be left with permanent brain damage, hearing loss, or limb amputations, or that the deadly bacteria kills up to 15 percent of people who get it.

Most painful of all, they didn't know immunization was available that could have protected their children from getting meningococcal meningitis.

These five mothers have united with the National Meningitis Association (NMA) to form the "Moms on Meningitis" (M.O.M.s), a new public awareness program. They hope to arm other parents of college-age children with the facts about this dangerous disease. Their message is "Don't Wait. Vaccinate."

Vaccination is highly effective against the most common strains of the disease and has minimal side effects, mostly soreness from the shot or mild fever. Immunization lasts three to five years—the length of time most students are away at college. (The vaccine is not advised for pregnant women and people with certain medical

conditions.)

College students are at special risk because lifestyles common in this age group are linked with meningococcal meningitis and have been known to compromise the immune system: communal living (group houses and dormitories), bars and clubs, smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke, irregular sleep habits, and the sharing of beverages, utensils, lip balm, etc.

To learn more about meningococcal meningitis and immunization, visit the National Meningitis Association web site at www.nmaus.org. The same site also offers more information about the M.O.M.s members and their stories.



Safety Checklist for College Students To Prevent Meningococcal Meningitis

■ Protecting Against Meningitis

Meningococcal meningitis spreads through contact with an infected person—for example, coughing or kissing. The best protection is preventing it altogether. Protect your college-age children by making sure they:

- ▶ *make an appointment for immunization (the pre-college physical is a good time to talk to your doctor about vaccination)*
- ▶ *avoid sharing drinking cups, bottles, glasses, mugs*
- ▶ *avoid sharing utensils or food that touches the mouth*
- ▶ *avoid sharing toothbrushes, lip balm, etc.*
- ▶ *avoid sharing cigarettes*
- ▶ *wash hands regularly*

■ Recognizing the Flu-Like Symptoms

Shock or death can come within hours after the first symptoms of meningococcal meningitis. If any one of the symptoms below comes on hard and fast, don't wait to see if it's only the flu: Call your doctor immediately. Symptoms include:

- ▶ *high fever*
- ▶ *nausea, vomiting*
- ▶ *sore throat*
- ▶ *sensitivity to light*
- ▶ *stiff neck*
- ▶ *rash*
- ▶ *bad headache*
- ▶ *exhaustion*

Source: National Meningitis Association, www.nmaus.org