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MEDIA ALERT

CLARIFICATION OF THE NEWLY APPROVED MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE VACCINATION RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON IMMUNIZATION PRACTICES

February 11, 2005

This media alert by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) has been issued due to various news reports that did not fully specify each of the age groups for which the new meningococcal immunization recommendations were approved by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). By issuing this alert, NFID encourages media reports to include a more complete listing/clarification of the actual meningococcal disease immunization recommendations, which specifically target the following age groups:

- Young adolescents at the adolescent visit (11-12 years old)
- Adolescents at high school entry (15 years old)
- College freshmen living in dormitories

ACIP approved the new recommendations to help ensure younger adolescents, as well as college freshmen living in dormitories, are immunized against meningococcal disease, commonly known as meningococcal meningitis or meningococcemia, a potentially fatal bacterial infection. The committee indicated that recommendations may be expanded to include additional adolescent age groups as vaccine supply increases in the coming years.

Health experts approved these recommendations in response to disease epidemiology data showing an increased risk for disease among adolescents and young adults, and the availability of a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine expected to provide longer term protection from the disease. Although rare, meningococcal disease is dangerous, because early symptoms resemble influenza, making it difficult to recognize. However, unlike influenza, the disease may progress rapidly and within hours of symptoms onset, may cause permanent disability or death.

Meningococcal disease is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in U.S. toddlers, adolescents and young adults. Symptoms include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion, and a rash may appear. Lifestyle factors thought to contribute to the disease include direct contact with infected persons, e.g., exchanging saliva, often through kissing; crowded living conditions, e.g., dormitories; and active or passive smoking. Vaccination is the best means of preventing meningococcal disease.

For more information about meningococcal meningitis vaccination, visit the NFID's Web site at www.nfid.org or CDC's Web site at www.cdc.gov.

Founded in 1973, NFID is a non-profit organization dedicated to public and professional educational programs about infectious diseases.

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