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CDC ISSUES NEW RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMMUNIZE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS AGAINST MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

National Foundation for Infectious Diseases Urges Physicians and Parents to Vaccinate These Newly Recommended Groups Against Devastating Bacterial Infection

BETHESDA, Md., (May 26, 2005) — New adolescent meningococcal disease vaccination recommendations published today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) call for routine meningococcal disease vaccination of young adolescents at the preadolescent doctor's visit (11-12 years). Further, for those not previously immunized, the CDC recommends vaccination at high school entry (or about age 15) and for incoming college freshman who will be living in dormitories. The recommendations also state that any other adolescents wishing to reduce their risk of meningococcal disease may elect to be immunized.

Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk for meningococcal disease, a potentially fatal bacterial infection. These age groups also may experience an unusually high mortality rate. According to one study, as many as one in four adolescents who contract the disease may die. Nearly 20 percent of those who survive meningococcal disease will suffer permanent disabilities, including brain damage, limb or digit amputation, skin scarring and hearing loss.

“CDC’s new immunization recommendations will help to protect adolescents and college students, who are at increased risk for contracting meningococcal disease,” said Carol J. Baker, MD, professor of pediatrics, head, section of pediatric infectious diseases, Baylor College of Medicine, and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Committee on Infectious Diseases. “It is important we do everything possible to ensure these new groups of adolescents are immunized and protected from the devastating nature of the disease.”

The new recommendations, published in this week’s issue of the CDC’s *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, match new recommendations also issued this week by the AAP and American College Health Association. In addition to adolescents and young adults, the recommendations further state persons at increased risk of invasive meningococcal disease should be immunized (e.g., persons without a spleen, travelers to regions with epidemic disease).

CDC’s new recommendations are in response to disease epidemiology data showing an increased risk for meningococcal disease among adolescents and young adults. The availability of a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine is expected to provide longer-term protection from the disease. Meningococcal disease is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in U.S. infants, children, adolescents and young adults. As sufficient vaccine supply allows, the recommendations are expanded to include all adolescents and additional age groups.

“Parents should speak with their child’s physician about these new recommendations and immunization,” said William Schaffner, MD, an NFID board member, and professor and chairman, department of preventive medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. “Health care providers are urged to learn more about these recommendations and to immunize U.S. teenagers and college students from this potentially deadly disease.”

Meningococcal disease affects up to 2,800 Americans each year. Initial symptoms of the disease often resemble more common viral infections, making the disease difficult to recognize. However, unlike viral infections, the disease may progress rapidly and within hours of symptom

onset, may cause permanent disability or death, reinforcing the importance of immunization. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, muscle pain, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion, and a rash may appear.

Lifestyle factors common among older adolescents and college students, including direct contact with infected persons, e.g., exchanging saliva, often through kissing; crowded living conditions, e.g., dormitories; and active or passive smoking, have been shown to contribute to the transmission of disease.

NFID Launches Educational Initiative Addressing Meningococcal Disease

To increase awareness about meningococcal disease and help clinicians implement the new immunization recommendations, NFID has launched a comprehensive educational initiative. In November 2004 NFID published a report, "The Changing Epidemiology of Meningococcal Disease Among U.S. Children, Adolescents and Young Adults," which outlines meningococcal disease epidemiology and disease burden in the U.S., as well as prevention methods.

To help ensure health care providers receive information about the new CDC recommendations, NFID also will distribute a new continuing medical education (CME) monograph for clinicians later this spring.

NFID also has plans underway to collaborate with other national medical and patient advocacy groups to develop and distribute a resource kit for clinicians called the ***S.T.O.P. Meningitis!*** *(**S**hare. **T**each. **O**utreach. **P**rotect.)* program that will provide clinicians with in-practice resource tools to help them implement the meningococcal disease vaccination recommendations.

For more information about the new meningococcal disease immunization recommendations for adolescents and college students, visit the CDC's Web site at www.cdc.gov or the AAP's Web site at www.aap.org. To obtain an electronic copy of NFID's published meningococcal disease report or to find additional information about meningococcal disease and immunization, visit the NFID's Web site at www.nfid.org. NFID's meningococcal disease awareness initiative is made possible by an unrestricted educational grant to NFID from sanofi pasteur.

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

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