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## **U.S. ADOLESCENTS VULNERABLE TO VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASES, ACCORDING TO NEW REPORT**

*National Foundation for Infectious Diseases Calls for Increased  
Immunization Rates among Adolescents*

**BETHESDA, MD – February 27, 2008** – The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), with support from the nation’s leading health organizations, has issued a Call to Action to improve low vaccination rates among a particularly vulnerable population: adolescents.

NFID’s Call to Action, *“Adolescent Immunization: Bridging from a Strong Childhood Foundation to a Healthy Adulthood,”* was developed following a meeting with top health organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Medical Association, Society for Adolescent Medicine and American Academy of Pediatrics. The report emphasizes the impact that vaccine-preventable diseases have on adolescents and their close contacts, and the benefits of vaccination, which extend beyond adolescents to the community at large.

“Vaccines are currently available to protect adolescents against 14 infectious diseases but they are significantly under-utilized, elevating risk of illness and even death,” said William Schaffner, M.D., Vice President, NFID. “As we have seen with childhood vaccination, widespread immunization of adolescents plays an essential role in disease control and prevention.”

As children enter their teens, they are at greater risk for contracting certain diseases, and are also vulnerable because immunity from some childhood vaccines wanes over time. Immunization is therefore a critical intervention for protecting adolescents’ health. However, the CDC’s 2007 National Immunization Survey – Teen (NIS-Teen), the first national survey to assess adolescent vaccination rates based on health care provider data, revealed alarmingly low rates of vaccination against potentially fatal diseases, especially for newer vaccines for meningococcal disease (12 percent vaccination coverage) and pertussis (11 percent vaccination coverage). Another new vaccine, for human papillomavirus (HPV), currently covers only 1 percent of female adolescents, despite recommendations for their immunization at age 11-12.

Immunization rates for catch-up vaccines were higher: 87 percent coverage for the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and 81 percent coverage for the hepatitis B vaccine; these rates are likely attributed to the fact that these vaccines have been on the immunization schedule for a longer time and so doctors are likely more aware of them and more accustomed to discussing them with patients.

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### **Adolescence: A High-Risk Time for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases**

Social and epidemiological factors combine to make adolescents particularly vulnerable to a host of serious diseases. Close contact with other teens in schools and overnight camps provide ideal conditions for the transmission of contagious diseases. These and other factors have contributed to the growing incidence of some vaccine-preventable diseases.

- Even when treated early, *meningococcal disease* kills 10 to 14 percent of those infected, and causes long-term effects, including brain damage, in 11 to 19 percent.
- *Pertussis* cases have been on the rise in the U.S. for the past 3 decades, despite the availability of vaccine. Some estimates are that pertussis strikes 1 million to more than 3 million in the U.S. annually.
- Although not included in the survey, *influenza* immunization is recommended for high-risk adolescent populations. Influenza kills more Americans every year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined.

“In light of the success of childhood immunization programs, which have led to the elimination of smallpox and significant reductions in measles and polio, it is clear that the public health and infectious diseases communities now need to focus on adolescent immunization,” said Dr. Schaffner.

### **Closing the Gap: Strategies to Increase Adolescent Immunization Rates**

By focusing on barriers to immunization related to patients, health care providers and our medical system, the Call to Action presents practical strategies that can be used to improve adolescent vaccination rates. These strategies include:

- Instituting routine health care visits for adolescents 11-12 years to provide a timely opportunity for adolescents to be fully vaccinated.
- Using every opportunity to vaccinate adolescents, including sports physicals.
- Educating adolescents and their parents or guardians about the benefits of vaccination.
- Establishing “quick visits” to provide convenient opportunities for adolescents to receive all recommended vaccinations.
- Administering vaccines at alternative sites, like schools and pharmacies, in addition to physicians’ offices.
- Creating a nationwide immunization tracking system and other mechanisms to minimize systemic barriers.

The Call to Action is available on NFID’s Web site at [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org). In addition, NFID is developing a toolkit to help patients and health care professionals implement the strategies presented in the Call to Action. The toolkit will also be available on NFID’s Web site in coming weeks.

### **About the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases**

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) is a non-profit, tax-exempt (501c3) organization founded in 1973 and dedicated to educating the public and healthcare professionals about the causes, treatment and prevention of infectious diseases. This initiative is made possible through an unrestricted educational grant to NFID from GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis and sanofi pasteur.