

VOICES OF MENINGITIS™

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

In collaboration with sanofi pasteur

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School Nurses in Kansas City Tackle Low Meningitis Vaccination Rates

Only 35% of Adolescents in Missouri Are Vaccinated Against Meningococcal Disease, Leaving Many Unprotected

KANSAS CITY, Mo, July 13 – The Missouri Association of School Nurses (MASN) and the Mid America Immunization Coalition have joined the *Voices of Meningitis* campaign to urge parents to vaccinate preteens and teens in Missouri against meningococcal disease, a rare but serious bacterial infection that can cause meningitis and take the life of a child in just a single day.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical groups recommend vaccination for preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age, and college freshmen living in dormitories. Yet despite these public health recommendations, only 35 percent of Missouri adolescents 13 through 17 years-of-age have been immunized, which is far below the CDC's goal of a 90 percent vaccination rate in 2010.

"School nurses are on the front lines with students every day, and our mission is to keep our students safe and healthy," said Kathy Pickering, RN, school nurse for Raytown School District. "School nurses in Kansas City have joined *Voices of Meningitis* to help raise awareness and encourage parents to speak to their child's school nurse or other health-care provider about meningococcal vaccination before coming back to school."

Many local community leaders, including the Mid America Immunization Coalition, a program of Mother & Child Health Coalition, and local residents are partnering with the MASN's *Voices of Meningitis* campaign to reinforce that vaccination is the best protection available against the disease.

Emily Robb, MD, of the Lee's Summit Physicians Group, has joined the campaign as a local "voice" of meningitis for Kansas City to help raise awareness among parents about this devastating disease. "As a physician and a survivor, I know first hand how important immunizations are, especially for preteens and teens," said Dr. Robb.

They also are joined by Maggi Pivovar, local resident and mom of four. Maggi survived meningococcal meningitis, but had both her legs amputated below the knee as a result of the disease.

"I've joined as a 'voice' of meningitis to share my personal story with the community and encourage local parents, preteens, and teens to learn about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and how to help prevent the disease," said Pivovar.

About 10 percent of the 1,000 to 2,600 Americans who get meningococcal disease each year will die. Death rates are up to five times higher among teenagers and young adults compared with other age groups. Of those who survive, one in five is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of limbs, brain damage, deafness and organ damage.

"We all are 'voices' of meningitis and it is our responsibility to spread the word and do everything we can to help prevent this devastating disease," said Pickering. "Every health-care visit is a vaccination opportunity."

About *Voices of Meningitis*

Voices of Meningitis brings together the 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 prevention 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 also features a comprehensive website, 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.

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." The Missouri Association of School Nurses (MASN) is an affiliate of the NASN.

For More Information

For more information about the *Voices of Meningitis* educational initiative, visit www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org. For information about the National Association of School Nurses, visit 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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