

## **NEW IMMUNIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESS INCREASED RISK OF MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE AMONG U.S. ADOLESCENTS AND COLLEGE STUDENTS**

In February 2005, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) issued new recommendations stating children at the pre-adolescent visit (11- to 12-year olds), adolescents at high school entry and college freshmen living in dormitories should be immunized against meningococcal disease. In addition, ACIP's recommendations state all other adolescents who wish to decrease their risk of meningococcal disease may elect to receive the vaccine.

This marks the first time the ACIP has recommended routine meningococcal immunization for 11- to 18-year olds. This age group accounts for nearly 30 percent of all cases of meningitis in the U.S. During the 1990s, one study reported a substantial increase in incidence among 15- to 24-year olds, as well as a fatality rate of more than 22 percent in this age group, up to five times that seen in younger persons. Specific behaviors such as smoking, kissing and crowded living conditions put both adolescents and college students at greater risk for meningococcal disease.

The good news is that up to 83 percent of meningococcal cases reported are caused by the potentially vaccine-preventable serogroups included in the first quadrivalent conjugate vaccine licensed in the U.S. for the prevention of meningococcal disease in adolescents and adults aged 11-55 years.

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but deadly bacterial infection that strikes between 1,500 and 3,400 Americans every year, causing meningitis or sepsis in the majority of cases. Approximately 10 percent of individuals who contract meningococcal disease will die. Of those who survive, up to one in five suffer permanent disabilities such as hearing loss, neurological damage and limb amputations.

Meningococcal disease is transmitted through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions, and close, personal contact. Symptoms can be mistaken for the flu, and may include fever, headache, stiff neck, vomiting, confusion, and a petechial or purpuric rash. Meningococcal disease can progress very rapidly and can kill an otherwise healthy young person in 48 hours or less.

Vaccination is the best method of prevention against meningococcal disease. There are risks associated with all vaccines. The meningococcal vaccine mentioned above can cause pain, redness and induration at the site of injection, headache, fatigue, and malaise. As with any vaccine, vaccination with this new quadrivalent meningococcal conjugate vaccine may not protect 100% of individuals.

For more information about meningococcal disease and immunization, visit the following Web sites:

- [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- [www.meningococcaldisease.com](http://www.meningococcaldisease.com)
- [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org)
- [www.sanofipasteur.us](http://www.sanofipasteur.us)