



New Meningococcal Meningitis Awareness Program, “Get in the Game” to Level Playing Field for Young Athletes

- *“Get in the Game” urges parents to take action and vaccinate against meningococcal disease in advance of the upcoming sports season*
- *“Get in the Game” national spokespeople Olympic swimmer and mom Dara Torres, and meningococcal disease survivors, Paralympic cyclist Jamie Schanbaum and former Division I basketball star, Rayna Dubose add their voices to the program*
- *In its fifth year, Voices of Meningitis, a public health initiative, continues to raise awareness about the danger and prevention of meningococcal disease*

Silver Springs, MD and Swiftwater, PA – June 13, 2013 –Voices of Meningitis, a public health initiative of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) in collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur, announced today the launch of *Get in the Game: Keeping Teens Healthy*, a new program to help educate parents on the danger and prevention of meningococcal disease. *Get in the Game* will help raise awareness about the serious consequences of the disease and motivate parents to speak with their children’s health care professional about vaccinating against meningococcal disease in advance of each sports season.

Although rare, meningococcal disease develops rapidly and can claim the life of an otherwise healthy person in as little as one day after the first symptoms appear.^{1,2} Meningococcal disease, which includes meningitis, bacteremia (severe blood infection) and pneumonia, is spread through respiratory droplets. Common everyday activities can facilitate transmission of the bacteria that cause the disease, including kissing; sharing utensils and water bottles; being in close quarters, such as living in a dormitory or staying at a sleep-away summer camp.^{1,3} Athletes can be at greater risk of exposure to meningococcal disease, since many sports involve physical contact and equipment sharing. In addition, participating in group practices, being in cramped locker rooms, and taking long bus trips can facilitate the spread of germs from person to person.^{4,5} Data from the CDC have shown that, following infancy, there is a second peak in meningococcal disease incidence among adolescents and young adults between 16 and 21 years of age.⁶

To help level the playing field, and as part of the *Get in the Game* program, champions for vaccination have come together to form Team Voices. Members include:

- Dara Torres, 12-time Olympic medal swimmer, *New York Times* best-selling author and mother of three
- Beth Matthey, MSN, RN, NCSN, incoming President-elect, National Association of School Nurses
- Jamie Schanbaum, meningococcal disease survivor and USA Cycling Paralympics Road National Championships gold medalist

- Rayna DuBose, meningococcal meningitis survivor and former Division I basketball standout at Virginia Tech

“Parents like me do all they can to protect their kids from harm, making sure they have the right equipment and protective gear when they’re playing sports. But there is one thing parents might be forgetting to guard their kids against – meningococcal disease,” said Dara Torres. “As a mom of young athletes, I’m glad to lend my voice to this meaningful public health program about the serious consequences of meningococcal disease and the importance of vaccination. I hope that parents will feel empowered and motivated to speak with their children’s health care professional to make sure their child is up to date with their vaccinations in advance of the sports season.”

Ten to 15 percent of the 800 to 1,200 Americans who get meningococcal disease each year will pass away from the disease.⁶ Of those who survive, nearly one in five are left with serious medical problems, including: amputation of arms, legs, fingers and toes; neurologic damage; deafness and kidney damage.⁶

To help protect against meningococcal disease, the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends routine vaccination of adolescents aged 11 through 18 years (a single dose of vaccine should be administered at age 11 or 12 years, with a booster dose at age 16 years for children who receive the first dose before age 16 years).⁷

Beth Matthey, MSN, RN, NCSN, incoming President-elect, National Association of School Nurses, added, “As a school nurse and a mom, I want parents to know that teens who have already been vaccinated for meningococcal meningitis may now need a booster to help protect them during the years when they are at greater risk of infection. Sports physicals are an excellent time to have that conversation with your health care provider – make your child’s appointment today and Get in the Game.”

About Meningococcal Disease and Meningococcal Meningitis

Meningococcal disease is a bacterial infection caused by *Neisseria meningitidis* and includes meningitis, bacteremia (severe blood infection) and pneumonia.⁶ Approximately 50 percent of meningococcal cases are meningococcal meningitis.⁶ Meningococcal meningitis is a serious bacterial infection that includes swelling of the tissues around the brain and spinal cord.⁶ Meningococcal meningitis develops rapidly and can claim the life of an otherwise healthy person in as little as one day after the first symptoms appear.^{1,2}

Data from the CDC have shown that, following infancy, there is a second peak in meningococcal disease incidence among adolescents and young adults between 16 and 21 years of age.⁶ Meningococcal disease is spread through respiratory droplets and direct contact with respiratory secretions.⁶

Voices of Meningitis

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and Sanofi Pasteur are working together on the Voices of Meningitis™ campaign, now in its fifth year, to help prevent children and teens from contracting meningococcal meningitis.

For more information, visit www.Facebook.com/VoicesofMeningitis

About NASN

The National Association of School Nurses is a non-profit specialty nursing organization, organized in 1968 and incorporated in 1977, representing school nurses exclusively. NASN has over 15,000 members and 50 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. To learn more about NASN, please visit us on the Web at www.nasn.org or call 866-627-6767.

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