

Children's Health



Add Meningitis Vaccination To Back-To-School Checklists

(NAPSA)—When preparing preteens and teens across the country for the new school year, vaccination against meningococcal disease needs to be at the top of *every* parent's back-to-school checklist.

Meningococcal disease is a rare, but serious bacterial infection that can cause meningitis and take the life of an otherwise healthy child in just a single day. Tiffany Thornton, of Disney Channel's "So Random!" knows firsthand about the dangers of meningitis. She nearly lost her life to the disease when she was a teen and has now joined the National Association of School Nurses' (NASN) *Voices of Meningitis* campaign, an initiative in collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur that aims to educate parents about the importance of vaccination for preteens and teens.

"I knew nothing about meningitis before I got sick and spent 10 days in the hospital fighting for my life—I was lucky to have survived," said Thornton. "If my parents and I had known that preteens and teens are at greater risk for meningitis, I would have been vaccinated. Parents should talk to their child's school nurse or health-care provider about vaccination to help protect them against this disease."

Health officials recommend vaccination for preteens and teens, but nearly half of teens in the U.S. have not been immunized. This is of concern as a new national telephone survey shows that the majority of preteens and teens engage in activities that put them at risk of meningitis, like sharing water bottles and kissing.

"Given meningitis is spread through common, everyday activities, it is difficult to help protect



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Tiffany Thornton

preteens and teens through education alone. Ensuring they are vaccinated is the best way to help protect preteens and teens from the disease," said Linda Davis-Alldritt, MA, BSN, RN, FNASN, FASHA, President of the NASN.

About 10 percent of the 1,000 to 2,600 Americans who get meningococcal meningitis each year will die. Of those who survive, one in five is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of limbs, brain damage, deafness and organ damage. Preventing meningitis is particularly important because the disease moves quickly and can be hard to recognize, especially in its early stages, because symptoms may be similar to those of the flu. Vaccination has been available for years and is a safe and effective way to help protect against meningitis.

Visit www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org or www.nasn.org for more information.