

# children's HEALTH

## Late Winter/Early Spring Is Meningitis Peak Season: Could Your Preteen Or Teen Be At Risk?

### National Meningitis Association Urges Parents To Protect Their Preteens And Teens Through Vaccination

(NAPSA)—What began for Gerald Pe as a pleasant day at the beach quickly turned into a fight for his life and resulted in him losing portions of his feet and suffering organ failure. Lynn Bozof's son, Evan, called home from college to say he had a terrible headache, and within hours was admitted to the intensive care unit; Evan died 26 days later. Gerald and Evan contracted meningococcal disease, more commonly known as meningitis, and your preteen and teenage children may also be at risk. The National Meningitis Association is urging parents this winter to get their preteen and teenage children vaccinated against this devastating disease.

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial infection that can lead to death or permanent disability, such as brain damage, organ failure or amputation of arms and/or legs, in a matter of hours. The disease can be easily misdiagnosed since early symptoms often mimic those of the flu and may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. In later stages, a rash may appear. Given its quick progression and devastating nature, prevention is the best approach to treating meningococcal disease.

"It wasn't until my son, Evan,



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died that my family learned about a simple vaccination that could have saved his life," said Lynn Bozof, Executive Director of the National Meningitis Association. "Meningococcal disease can strike anyone at any time of year, but cases peak in late winter and early spring. With meningitis peak season upon us, I encourage parents to speak with their child's health care provider about meningococcal vaccination."

Preteens and teens are at greater risk for meningococcal disease, accounting for nearly 30 percent of the estimated 3,000 cases that occur in the U.S. each year. The good news

is the majority of cases among preteens and teens can potentially be prevented through vaccination. This is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends meningococcal vaccination for all preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age and college freshmen living in dormitories.

Meningococcal disease is spread through air droplets and direct contact with those who are infected, such as through coughing or kissing. Certain lifestyle factors, such as dormitory-style living, prolonged close contact with large groups of other teens, irregular sleep patterns and active or passive smoking, are thought to put preteens and teens at increased risk for the infection.

"I knew the meningococcal vaccine was recommended for teens, but I didn't realize how serious meningococcal disease can be or that I was at increased risk, so I never made an appointment to get vaccinated," said Gerald Pe, a meningococcal disease survivor. "I almost lost my life to meningococcal disease. I urge you to have your preteens and teens vaccinated. Don't wait until it's too late."

For more information about meningococcal disease and prevention, visit the National Meningitis Association's Web site at [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org).