

# Teen Group Has Warning For Others About Deadly Disease

(NAPSA)—Five teenagers from across the United States now share the common bond of surviving a devastating bacterial infection, called meningococcal meningitis, that often strikes adolescents and young adults. These teens have come together to fight back against the disease that almost took their lives and make sure other families don't suffer the same tragedy by educating about the disease and immunization.

Before contracting meningococcal meningitis, these adolescents and their families knew little or nothing about the disease, or that adolescents and young adults are at greater risk. Adolescents and young adults account for nearly 30 percent of all meningococcal meningitis cases in the U.S. each year. This age group also is more likely to die from the infection; one out of four cases among adolescents is fatal. Most importantly, these survivors and their families didn't know that immunization is available that could have protected them from getting meningococcal meningitis.

While these adolescents survived, each suffered devastating side effects from the disease. They all underwent amputations that changed their lives forever, losing arms, legs, fingers or toes in order to save their lives. Additionally, some experienced kidney disease or hearing loss. Nearly 20 percent of all meningococcal disease survivors suffer permanent, long-lasting side effects.

These five survivors have united with the National Meningitis Association (NMA) to form "Together Educating About Meningitis" (T.E.A.M.), a new public awareness program. The goal of the T.E.A.M. program is to save other families from suffering from the devastating effects of meningococcal disease by encouraging parents and teens to learn about the increased risk of meningococcal meningitis, its symptoms and prevention approaches to the disease, including immunization.

Certain lifestyle factors common

## **Safety Checklist for Adolescents and Young Adults to Prevent Meningococcal Meningitis**

### ■ Protection Against Meningitis

The best protection against meningococcal meningitis is prevention. Protect adolescents and young adults by:

- ▶ *considering immunization – 80% of cases among this group are vaccine-preventable*
- ▶ *not sharing items that touch a person's mouth, including utensils, lip balm and water bottles*
- ▶ *washing hands regularly*

### ■ Recognize the Flu-Like Symptoms

Shock or death can come within hours after first symptoms are present. If any of the symptoms below are unusually sudden or severe, call your doctor immediately. Don't wait.

- ▶ *high fever*
- ▶ *nausea, vomiting*
- ▶ *confusion*
- ▶ *sensitivity to light*
- ▶ *stiff neck*
- ▶ *rash*
- ▶ *bad headache*
- ▶ *exhaustion*



For more information about preventing meningococcal meningitis and the T.E.A.M. program visit the National Meningitis Association Web site, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org), or call 1-866-FONE-NMA.

Source: National Meningitis Association, [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org) 

among adolescents and young adults seem to be linked to the disease, including crowded living conditions, such as dorms, boarding school or sleep-away camps; irregular sleep patterns; and the sharing of items such as beverages, utensils and lip balm—or anything that touches the mouth—since the disease is spread through saliva.

Early symptoms of meningococcal meningitis often resemble the flu, such as fever, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting and exhaustion. After the disease has taken hold, a rash may appear. The disease can attack the body very quickly, and within 24 hours can result in disability or death.

The vaccination for meningococcal meningitis is highly effective against the most common strains of the disease and has minimal side effects, mostly soreness from the

shot or mild fever. Protection lasts three to five years. New conjugate vaccines will soon be available, which have been shown to create more powerful, longer-lasting immune responses.

To learn more about meningococcal meningitis and prevention methods, visit the National Meningitis Association Web site at [www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org). There is also information about the T.E.A.M. members and their stories.

### **National Meningitis Association (NMA)**

NMA is a nonprofit organization founded by parents of children who have died or suffered long-term side effects as a result of meningococcal meningitis. Its mission is to educate families, medical professionals and others about bacterial meningitis and prevention approaches to the disease.