

# VOICES OF MENINGITIS™

A Meningococcal Disease Prevention Campaign  
from the National Association of School Nurses

In collaboration with sanofi pasteur

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **School Nurses in San Diego Tackle Low Meningitis Vaccination Rates**

*Less than Half of Adolescents in California Are Vaccinated Against Meningococcal Disease,  
Leaving Many Unprotected*

SAN DIEGO, August 17, 2010 – The California School Nurses Organization (CSNO) and the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency have joined the *Voices of Meningitis* campaign to urge parents to vaccinate preteens and teens in San Diego against meningococcal disease, a rare but serious bacterial infection that can cause meningitis and take the life of a child in just a single day.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other leading medical groups recommend vaccination for preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age, and college freshmen living in dormitories. Yet despite these public health recommendations, only 48 percent of adolescents 13 through 17 years of age have been immunized in California, which is far below the CDC's goal of a 90 percent vaccination rate in 2010.

"School nurses are on the front lines with students every day, and our mission is to keep our students safe and healthy," said Dale Parent, Special Projects Nurse at San Diego Unified School District and past-president of the CSNO. "School nurses in San Diego have joined *Voices of Meningitis* to help raise awareness and encourage parents to speak to their child's school nurse or health-care provider about meningococcal vaccination before coming back to school."

Many local community leaders, including the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, are partnering with CSNO's *Voices of Meningitis* campaign to reinforce that vaccination is the best protection available against the disease.

They also are joined by Jonathan Deguzman who contracted meningococcal meningitis as a college student and lost his fingers and both of his feet to the disease.

"I've joined as a 'voice' of meningitis to share my personal story with the community and encourage local parents, preteens, and teens to learn about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and how to help prevent the disease," said Deguzman.

About 10 percent of the 1,000 to 2,600 Americans who get meningococcal disease each year will die. Death rates are up to five times higher among teenagers and young adults compared with other age groups. Of those who survive, one in five is left with serious medical problems, including amputation of limbs, brain damage, deafness and organ damage.

"Although meningococcal disease may be rare, the consequences of the disease are devastating," said Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County Public Health Officer, San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency. "Parents of adolescents and young adults should ensure that their children receive the recommended meningitis vaccine."

"We all are 'voices' of meningitis and it is our responsibility to spread the word and do everything we can to help prevent this devastating disease," said Parent. "Every health-care visit is a vaccination opportunity."

### **About *Voices of Meningitis***

*Voices of Meningitis* brings together the many "voices" of meningitis – school nurses, parents whose children have been affected by the disease, survivors of meningococcal meningitis, and public health professionals – to raise awareness about the dangers of meningococcal meningitis and the importance of prevention for preteen and teenage children.

*Voices of Meningitis* includes educational materials for the public and health-care providers, as well as a public service campaign featuring school nurses, disease survivors, and families affected by meningitis. The campaign also features a comprehensive website, [www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org), where visitors can hear the compelling stories of families that have been personally affected by meningitis and access educational information about the disease and the importance of vaccination.

### **About Meningococcal Disease**

Meningococcal disease is a serious infection that can cause meningitis (swelling of the brain or spinal cord) or meningococemia (blood infection). The disease can be spread through common everyday activities, such as sharing eating utensils and drinking glasses, living in close quarters like dormitories or overnight summer camps, and kissing. Meningococcal disease can be hard to recognize, especially in its early stages, because symptoms are similar to those of more common viral illnesses. Unlike more common illnesses, the disease can progress quickly and may cause death or disability in just a single day.

Public health officials recommend meningococcal vaccination for preteens and teens 11 through 18 years of age, college freshmen living in dormitories and children 2 through 10 years of age who are at increased risk or if elected by their health-care providers and parents.

Vaccines are available for people who wish to reduce their risk for contracting the disease.

### **About the National Association of School Nurses**

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) is a non-profit specialty nursing organization, organized in 1968 and incorporated in 1977, representing school nurses exclusively. NASN has over 14,000 members and 51 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."

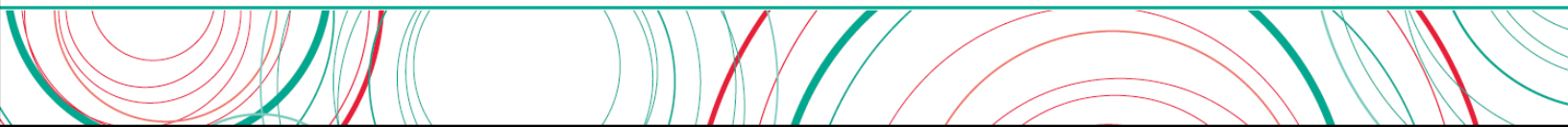
### **About the California School Nurses Organization**

The California School Nurses Organization (CSNO) is an affiliate of the NASN. The CSNO was formally organized in 1950, following two years of meetings for "the promotion of comprehensive and constructive school health programs." Today, the organization's goals continue to be the promotion of comprehensive school health programs, leadership development, legislative advocacy for children's health and school health issues, and fostering communication among school nurses.

CSNO has approximately 1,400 members throughout California. CSNO members serve children from birth through 22 years of age in all school settings.

### **For More Information**

For more information about the *Voices of Meningitis* educational initiative, visit [www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org](http://www.VoicesOfMeningitis.org). For information about the National Association of School Nurses, visit [www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org) or call 866-627-6767. For state specific information, select "Affiliate Organizations" under "QUICKLINKS" on the NASN homepage.



*Voices of Meningitis* is a program of the National Association of School Nurses in collaboration with sanofi pasteur, the vaccines division of sanofi-aventis Group.

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