



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Ontario government applauded for adopting broad protection strategy against meningococcal meningitis**

*-- All grade 7 students in Ontario will be provided Menactra® vaccine --*

Waterloo, ON, (June 2, 2009) – The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada (MRFC) applauds the government of Ontario's decision, announced yesterday, to introduce a routine immunization program that will provide broad protection against all four of the vaccine-preventable strains of invasive meningococcal disease (IMD). Beginning in September, all grade 7 students in Ontario will be offered a vaccine called Menactra®.

Meningococcal disease, such as meningococcal meningitis, is one of the most devastating diseases in Canada. There are five common bacterial strains that cause meningococcal disease (A, B, C, Y and W-135). Four of the five strains are vaccine-preventable (A, C, Y and W-135). Strain C has been responsible for outbreaks in the past and has been the main focus of public health immunization programs in Canada. However, according to recent statistics, Menactra® has the potential to prevent up to 80 % more cases of meningococcal disease in adolescents (the population that is at highest risk for vaccine-preventable IMD), than the monovalent meningococcal conjugate C vaccine.

"It is important for children and adolescents to be protected against all four vaccine-preventable strains," said Dr. Saul Greenberg, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Community Pediatrician. "We continue to see cases of meningococcal disease, which could have been prevented with the routine use of Menactra®. The government has made a wise decision for protecting the health of adolescents."

Ontario's decision to fund this vaccine for Grade 7 students comes on the heels of a recent statement issued by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) which is now recommending that a dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine be offered in early adolescence, ideally around 12 years of age, even if the adolescent was previously vaccinated as part of a routine infant or toddler vaccination program.

Routine meningococcal C programs have had a positive impact on reducing the number of cases caused by strain C. However, children and adolescents were still vulnerable to the other vaccine-preventable strains, which Menactra® protects against. New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the Northwest Territories have also implemented routine Menactra® adolescent immunization programs.

"As a parent personally affected by this disease, I am pleased with Ontario's decision to provide funding for broad protection against the four vaccine-preventable strains of meningococcal meningitis," said Katie Grassie, Keswick, Ontario resident. "My son, Keaton, contracted meningococcal meningitis strain Y. While my son survived, both of his lower legs had to be amputated. At the time of Keaton's illness, our family didn't have the choice of broad protection against the four vaccine-preventable strains of meningococcal meningitis. From one family to another, I urge all parents to become informed about this devastating disease and talk to their doctor about broad protection for their family."

"I am encouraged with Ontario's announcement because it recognizes the need to protect against other strains of meningitis beyond strain C," said Colin Campbell from British Columbia, whose 15-year-old son, Brodie, contracted meningococcal meningitis and died in less than 48 hours. "Despite the fact that Brodie

had been vaccinated for the Group C meningococcal strain, he died from the Group Y strain. Afterwards, my wife and I learned that this could have been prevented if Brodie had been given a vaccine that provides protection against all four vaccine-preventable strains of meningitis.”

An average of four Canadians develops meningococcal disease each week. The disease can cause serious illness, long-term disabilities such as amputation and neurological damage, and can even be fatal. Even with timely and appropriate medical care, approximately one in 10 individuals who contract the disease will die. Death can occur within 24-48 hours after the onset of symptoms in a previously healthy individual. Of those who survive, up to one in five suffers permanent disabilities.

“The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada applauds the government of Ontario for acknowledging the need for broad protection against meningococcal disease,” said Kathryn Blain, founder of the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada and a mother who lost her son, Michael Longo, to meningitis. “This acknowledgment is a positive step. Families with children of all ages should be aware of this deadly disease and protect themselves appropriately.”

For more information about broad protection against meningococcal disease, parents should talk to their doctor.

#### **About the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada**

The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada (MRFC) was established in 1998 after a mother suddenly lost her otherwise healthy son to the disease. The mission of the foundation is to prevent death and disability from meningitis and other infections of the central nervous system. Through education the MRFC provides support to patients and their families affected by meningitis; increases public awareness of meningitis; and promotes better understanding of the disease among healthcare professionals. The MRFC also provides funds for research into improved diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of meningitis.

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