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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**NEW MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE VACCINATION
RECOMMENDATIONS EXPECTED TO REDUCE
DISABILITY AND DEATH AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND
COLLEGE FRESHMEN**

*National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) Applauds CDC's Advisory
Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) for its Decision to Recommend
Routine Meningococcal Disease Immunization*

February 10, 2005

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) strongly supports new meningococcal disease immunization recommendations made today targeting young adolescents (11-12 years old), adolescents at high school entry (15 years old), as well as all college freshmen living in dormitories. The new recommendations were approved by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) to help ensure certain young adolescents and college freshmen are immunized against meningococcal disease, commonly known as meningococcal meningitis or meningococemia, a potentially fatal bacterial infection. The committee indicated that recommendations may be expanded to include additional age groups as vaccine supply increases in the coming years.

“As a clinician, I have seen first hand the devastating effects of meningococcal disease, which can include brain damage, hearing loss, limb amputation and death. That’s why immunization is so important,” said Susan J. Rehm, MD, NFID’s medical director and staff physician, department of infectious disease, Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

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“NFID supports these recommendations, which provide public health guidance on a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine that will help protect those at risk from this potentially vaccine-preventable disease,” said Dr. Rehm.

Health experts approved these recommendations in response to disease epidemiology data showing an increased risk for disease among adolescents and young adults, and the availability of a new meningococcal conjugate vaccine expected to provide longer term protection from the disease. Although rare, meningococcal disease is dangerous, because early symptoms resemble influenza, making it difficult to recognize. However, unlike influenza, the disease may progress rapidly and within hours of symptoms onset, may cause permanent disability or death.

Meningococcal disease is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis in U.S. toddlers, adolescents and young adults. Symptoms include high fever, headache, stiff neck, confusion, nausea, vomiting, exhaustion, and a rash may appear. Lifestyle factors thought to contribute to the disease include direct contact with infected persons, e.g., exchanging saliva, often through kissing; crowded living conditions, e.g., dormitories; and active or passive smoking. Vaccination is the best means of preventing meningococcal disease.

NFID’s Meningococcal Disease Education Initiative

As meningococcal disease immunization recommendations are implemented NFID plans to play a key role in the education process. NFID has launched an education initiative on meningococcal disease beginning with a report, “The Changing Epidemiology of Meningococcal Disease Among U.S. Children, Adolescents and Young Adults,” issued in November 2004, which outlines meningococcal disease epidemiology and disease burden in the U.S., as well as prevention methods. This report is being adapted for continuing medical education (CME) credit upon release of the new meningococcal disease immunization recommendations. Electronic copies of the current report and soon-to-be-released CME version can be accessed via NFID’s Web site, www.nfid.org.

For more information about meningococcal meningitis vaccination, visit the NFID’s Web site or CDC’s Web site at www.cdc.gov.

Founded in 1973, NFID is a non-profit organization dedicated to public and professional educational programs about infectious diseases.