



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT: Jennifer Corrigan**  
**Alembic Health Communications**  
**732-382-8898**  
[.corrigan@comcast.net](mailto:.corrigan@comcast.net)

### **Back-to-School Checklist Should Include Ensuring Vaccinations are Up-to-Date**

(Atlanta, Ga.) – A new school year can be a busy time for families. As busy as it is, it's a critical time for parents to make sure their children are up-to-date on all recommended adolescent vaccines. The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is urging parents to protect their children from serious, sometimes life-threatening illnesses before they send them back to school.

One such illness is meningococcal disease, a deadly but potentially vaccine-preventable bacterial infection that can kill or disable an otherwise healthy child within hours of its first symptoms. Although people of all ages can get the disease, adolescents and young adults are at greater risk than most. Returning to school places adolescents in situations where they are in long-term close contact with large groups, which is believed to contribute to this risk. Whether kids are preparing for junior high, high school or college, it's important to ensure they have been vaccinated for meningococcal disease.

Ashley Lee had just begun her freshman year in college when she nearly lost her life to meningococcal disease. She spent several months in the hospital and lost her left foot and some fingers. Ashley's battle did not end there. Two and a half years later, she was still struggling with the pain and damage caused by the disease. Faced with the most difficult decision of her life, she decided to also have her right foot amputated in order to live a more active life.

Ashley's family doctor had recommended that she get vaccinated at the student health center at college. When school started, though, she was busy with classes, making new friends and having fun. Going to the health center for a vaccine was the furthest thing from her mind.

"I was a teenager. I never thought something like this could happen to me," said Ashley Lee. "But it did. I got meningococcal disease. I lost so much to this disease. No one should have to go through this."

Meningococcal disease, also known as bacterial meningitis, can cause meningitis and blood infection. Sometimes, the early symptoms – fever, aches and exhaustion – can be mistaken for flu, making the disease hard to diagnose. Even with prompt treatment, one in seven adolescents will die. Up to 20 percent of those who survive suffer long-term

disabilities such as brain damage, loss of kidney function, hearing loss or limb amputations.

The majority of cases among preteens and teens can potentially be prevented through vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends meningococcal vaccination for all adolescents 11 through 18 years of age, ideally at their 11-12 year-old check-up. Vaccination is also recommended for other people at increased risk for the disease, including college freshmen living in dormitories.

### **Other vaccinations recommended for preteens**

Meningococcal disease is just one of many serious diseases that adolescents and young adults can get. Even if immunized in early childhood or infancy, preteens still need certain vaccines to stay protected into adulthood, such as tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough); human papillomavirus (which causes cervical cancer in women) and influenza (flu). In addition, children who missed vaccines or were only partially immunized as infants need “catch-up” vaccines at age 11-12.

“Now – before school starts – is the best time to make sure your child has received all the recommended vaccinations for adolescents,” said Lynn Bozof, president of the National Meningitis Association. “Having your children vaccinated is one of the most important ways you can protect them.”

For more information about adolescent vaccines, visit NMA’s preteen website: [.preteenvaccines.org](http://preteenvaccines.org).

To view a video of Ashley Lee telling her story and to see others share their experiences with meningococcal disease, please visit: [://www.nmaus.org/programs](http://www.nmaus.org/programs).

### **About NMA**

The National Meningitis Association (NMA) is a nonprofit organization founded by parents whose children have died or live with permanent disabilities from meningococcal disease. Ashley Lee is part of NMA’s “Together Educating About Meningitis” (T.E.A.M.) program whose mission is to help educate others about the dangers of meningococcal disease and prevention methods, including immunization. For more information, please visit the National Meningitis Association’s website at [.nmaus.org](http://nmaus.org).