



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**FUNDING MENINGITIS VACCINES MEANS HEALTHIER CHILDREN**

*New vaccines added to routine immunization program in Manitoba*

**WINNIPEG, Manitoba – April 29, 2004** – The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada is pleased by the Manitoba government’s decision to include conjugate meningococcal C and pneumococcal meningitis vaccines in the province’s routine immunization schedule. Yesterday’s announcement, which coincides with National Immunization Awareness Week, demonstrates the province’s commitment to protecting children by funding meningitis vaccines that will prevent serious childhood illnesses and their complications.

“All parents, regardless of their economic status, can now be confident their children will have the best protection against the leading causes of bacterial meningitis,” said Kathryn Blain, Chair of the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada. “With this announcement, the Manitoba government is protecting the province’s children from experiencing the devastating effects of the disease and the Foundation applauds their commitment.”

Meningitis vaccination programs will be introduced to Manitoba’s current childhood immunization schedule in a staged approach beginning this fall and will be administered by public health nurses and physicians. Program details, including which age groups will receive the new vaccines, will be announced during the planning process. The Meningitis Research Foundation looks forward to working with government to offer guidance and counsel as program details are rolled out.

“We invite the Manitoba government to call upon the Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada for support and assistance as they execute the new immunization program,” said Dr. Dion Neame, Associate Medical Advisor for the Meningitis Research Foundation and Member of the Department of Paediatrics at McMaster Children’s Hospital in Hamilton. “Together with the Manitoba government, we will continue to make parents aware that these vaccines are available and educate them about their protective value so they will be confident when vaccinating their children against these diseases.”

**About Meningitis**

Meningitis is a bacterial or viral infection that causes inflammation of the membranes that envelope the brain and spinal cord. There are more than 50 types of bacteria that can cause meningitis, but the two most common forms are *Neisseria meningitidis* and *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, causing meningococcal and pneumococcal meningitis, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Even with early diagnosis and appropriate therapy, between five and 10 per cent of bacteria meningitis cases result in death. Furthermore, 15 to 20 per cent of those who survive will suffer neurological damage, such as deafness and mental retardation.<sup>2</sup>

**Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada**

The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada (MRFC) was established in 1998 after Kathryn Blain 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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**References:**

1. Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada - [www.meningitis.ca](http://www.meningitis.ca) - Accessed January 22, 2004
2. World Health Organization – Meningococcal Meningitis Fact Sheet – [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/2003/fs141/en/print.html](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/2003/fs141/en/print.html) - Accessed January 22, 2004