

Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada Applauds Meningitis Awareness, but Encourages Broadened Education

Waterloo, ON, March 27, 2007 -- The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada is pleased to see recent efforts by Ontario Public Health Units to raise awareness of meningitis and the importance of vaccination. As part of a broader education program, however, parents should also be aware that current immunization programs only protect against meningitis strain C.

Other strains of the disease – B, Y and W-135 – are also responsible for many meningitis cases in Ontario. In fact, between 1998 and 2003, there have been marked changes in the landscape of meningitis involving strains, C, Y, and W-135. The number of cases caused by strain C annually, **decreased** from 23 in 1998 - 2001 to 14 cases per year in 2002 - 2003. On the other hand, the number of cases caused by strains Y and W-135 **increased** from 11 cases per year in 1998 - 2001 to 22 cases in 2002 - 2003.

Meningococcal strain distribution changes over time and geographic region. Recently, a conjugated vaccine* which prevents against all four preventable strains, including strains A, C, Y, and W-135 was made available in Canada.

Within the current immunization program (strain C protection only), the vaccine offered to all Canadians could have prevented 119 cases of disease, between 1998 and 2003. With the new vaccine*, effective against strains A, C, Y, W-135, an additional 88 cases could have been prevented.

Broad protection provided through this new vaccine is essential to provide optimal prevention of meningitis in Canada. The Meningitis Research Foundation of Canada hopes the province will consider optimal prevention of meningitis through broad protection with this newest vaccine.

Until that time, parents should be aware of their options so they can, in conjunction with their family physicians, make an informed decision about protecting their child from this tragic disease.

Working together, we can ensure no family has to experience the devastation of vaccine-preventable meningitis.

*Menactra.

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