



Memo of Support A.791/S.4324

An act to amend public health law in relation to requiring vaccination against meningococcal disease

The NYS AAP, representing more than 4,100 pediatricians across New York State, enthusiastically supports A.791/S.4324. This legislation would require immunization against meningococcal disease at entry to sixth grade or at the age a young person would enter sixth grade and a booster in 11th grade. Catching students at these two milestone ages, while still in school, gives communities across the state a better chance to actually immunize this population before it scatters to college or other congregate living arrangements. It would also cover young people going off to summer camp as young campers or as counselors.

Meningitis is a serious and sometimes lethal disease which often attacks teens and young adults. It can progress rapidly, sometimes in a matter of hours, and kill the healthiest adolescents. Symptoms in the early stages of the disease often mimic those of more common and less serious diseases such as flu or colds. This can make early diagnosis a challenge, especially among adolescents and young adults who think of themselves as the “immortals,” and often shun medical attention.

Meningococcal infection is usually acquired through intimate contact with an infected person, including kissing, sharing foods/beverage, or by coughing/sneezing. It can spread quickly in congregate living arrangements like a camp or campus/dorm setting. And it can spread in locker rooms and team sports facilities.

Recent studies indicate that the case fatality rate in adolescents who contract meningococcal disease could be as high as 20-40%. Among survivors of all ages, 11%-19% will be permanently disabled as a result of scarring and limb loss from gangrene, stroke, or central nervous system symptoms.

Adolescents are at an increased risk of this disease and have a higher death rate than most age groups. Many parents are unaware of this disease and the vaccine that can prevent it, until it strikes in their community or at the camp or campus where their teen is living. We now have an opportunity to begin preventing disease by driving up immunization rates through school requirements when the risk of disease begins to rise---in pre-adolescents entering 6th grade.

Because meningococcal disease progresses so rapidly and its effects are so severe (even with appropriate treatment) immunization of pre-teen and adolescent students would help protect them from this potentially devastating disease.

The Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices, which is the CDC's vaccine advisory board, recommends routine vaccination in adolescent years of age. Mandating immunization at entry to 6th grade will help protect adolescents and young adults as they move through their highest risk age cohort and into their highest risk living arrangements.

NYS AAP District II urges passage of this legislation this year, to help protect teens and young adults across our state.

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